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AGGESDEN VICARAGE

OR

BRIDGET STOREY'S FIRST CHARGE

A TALE FOR THE YOUNG



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

JOHN W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.

1859.

[The Author reserves the right of Translation.]

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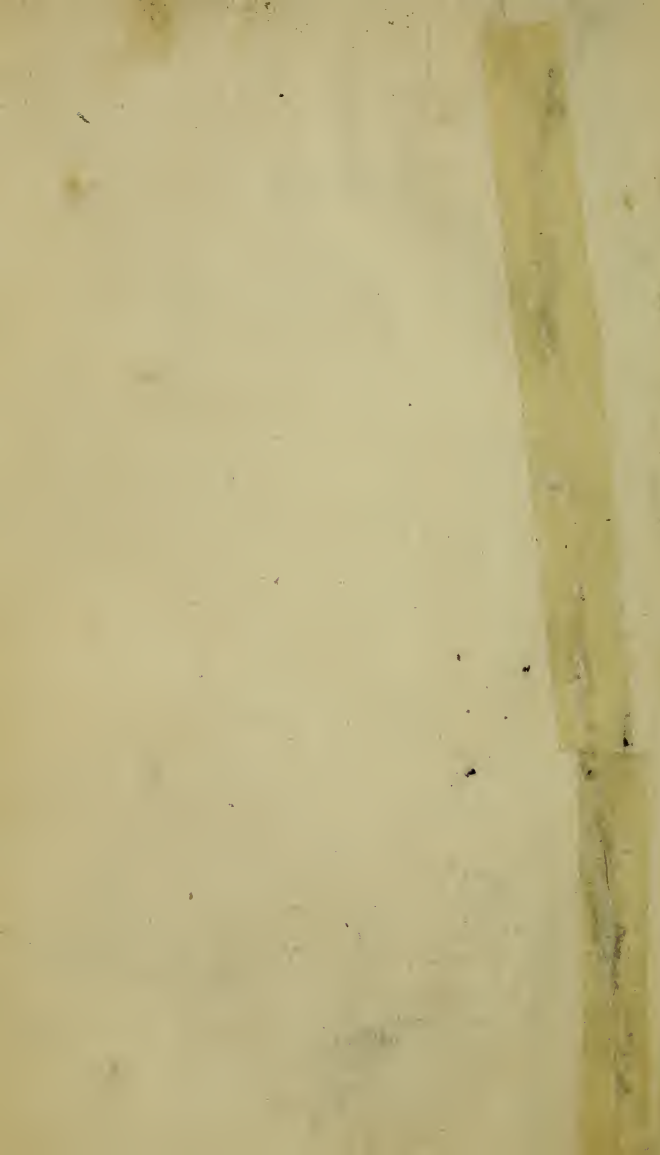
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AGGESDEN VICARAGE.

CHAPTER I.

EXPECTATIONS.

For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature and of noble mind.

Idylls of the King.

‘MAMMA, this seems the very thing ;’ and Bridget Storey looked up with sparkling eyes from the advertisement-sheet of the *Guardian*, which she had been slowly but regularly perusing in search of what she had now found.

‘What, my dear?’

‘This. ‘Wanted immediately, in a clergyman’s family in the country, a governess to superintend the education of three little girls from fourteen to eight, also of one boy aged five. Salary fifty pounds a-year. Thorough acquaintance with English, French, and music indispensable requisites. For further particulars, address A. G., Post-office, Massing, Worcestershire.’ Quite in the country, mamma, and a clergyman’s family, too ; just what I should like.’

The speaker, a girl of one-and-twenty, with nothing remarkable about her in shape, feature, or colouring, seldom had been so animated as now.

‘Only fifty pounds a-year,’ repeated Mrs. Storey.

‘Quite as much as I’m worth, mamma ; and a first situation and all. Do let me answer it.’

‘We must ask your father.’

‘But answering the advertisement does not commit me, and we should lose one whole day’s post. Some one may get before me. Clergyman’s family, country, and a boy, mamma ; I am sure it would do. I am so glad there is that boy. I wish they were all boys.’

Few would have shared Bridget Storey’s wish, certainly not the pale, harassed-looking lady who two streets off had that very morning been pondering long over that same advertisement, and against whose experience Bridget would have had but poor chance. ‘Wanted immediately’—‘country air is all I want ; but that boy—no, I am in no state to undertake boys, and I must run no risk of being sent home ill again.’

And so Miss Robinson, with a sigh, gave up her first thought of applying for the situation on which Bridget had now set her heart.

And don’t begin by pitying a girl of one-and-twenty for setting her heart on an advertisement that neither you nor I can think very promising. At her own desire most of what her father could have saved for her future provision had been expended as earned on her education, Bridget preferring to be a governess and well-educated rather than a clerk’s idle daughter and uneducated ; she was now longing to make use (as she had always been told, if the capital of her little provision were spent, she must do) of her powers, such as they were : she would work for herself by-and-bye, but just now she had

another incentive to immediate action far dearer, that of enabling her father to continue her second brother, John, at King's College, a matter that income-tax and other expenses and vicissitudes made daily a more perplexing problem ; and to her mind, going out as a governess, in her line of life, involved no loss of caste ; would keep her own talents bright and in use, and give her an insight into new modes of life and thought ; open wider interests to one who began to find those surrounding No. 6, Laurel-terrace, Islington, rather narrow and irritating.

She did write to ' A. G., Worcester,' and awaited in a fever of impatience the answer she never doubted Thursday's post would bring. ' Only twelve hours more,' she thought, as she sat over her work as it struck eight on Wednesday evening. But Thursday brought no answer, nor Friday, nor Saturday. Sunday in London is a blank letter day, and by that time Bridget felt very cross, very much disappointed, telling her mother they must have thought her too young, or not liked her handwriting, and rejected her at once, and that she did not expect to hear now. Thinking secretly Monday with its rather late-delivered letters would never come, meanwhile could she in her excitement have misdirected her letter, or had she indeed been too late ? too truly, now she thought of it, the paper had been all but a week old.

Monday morning came, and about ten minutes before the postman could be expected, Mrs. Storey wanted some buttons for John's shirts, and Bridget offered at once to go out for them. Anything

for action till those minutes of suspense were over, even to escape the moment when the letters came.

She was very young, reader ; forgive her !

‘ Here, Bridget,’ said her mother, as she entered with a beating heart under an externally calm manner, ‘ the Worcester post-mark.’

Bridget threw down the buttons, seized the letter, rushed upstairs, and bolted the door to meet her joy or disappointment alone.

‘ MADAM,—I regret that your letter of the 9th has remained so long unanswered. You request further particulars. The three girls who would be entirely under your charge are Mary, Anna, and Caroline Arnold, aged fourteen, eleven, and eight. Little Master Robert was five last April, and has a temper of his own, I must warn you, for you seem to Mrs. (this was scratched out) me young for so numerous a charge. In every other particular I think you would suit us extremely well, and should my little son not be an insuperable objection, I shall be glad to hear from you again. We would do our best to make you happy, but, remember, you would be more than a hundred miles from town.

‘ Yours, very truly,

‘ ANNA G. ARNOLD.’

‘ No,’ said Bridget at once, for she possessed a little keen-sightedness of her own, ‘ this is a gentleman’s hand and a gentleman’s note, I am sure. I wonder if Mrs. Arnold is an invalid. But it is very kind, and as for the boy, and its being so far from Islington, why those are just the very things that make me so much want to go.’

And on a bright October afternoon, just three weeks later, Bridget Storey alighted at the little Massing Station, a new page of life lying yet unturned before her.

Then she first felt some of the trials of the lot that choice and necessity combined had made hers. She had to see after luggage, and then look round for the trace of any one likely hereafter to be a friend, or at least better known.

‘For Aggesden Vicarage, miss?’ asked the country stationmaster, seeing her thus look round.

‘Yes.’

‘One of the young gentlemen’s waiting for you outside—couldn’t leave the pony, or he’d have come on the platform;’ and the master led the way through the little station to the newly-made and stony station road.

Here was one solitary vehicle, a pony carriage, and in the front seat a boy of twelve or so whistling ‘There is nae luck about the house;’ on hearing footsteps he turned round, sprang down, and approached Bridget, frankly touching his cap like a little gentleman.

‘Miss Storey? papa was sorry he was busy and could not come; let me help you in, and I and Baines will see to your luggage. I am afraid I must ask you to ride in the back seat.’ He held out his hand, and Bridget instinctively obeyed and mounted.

Certainly her view of this young Arnold, as he and Baines (rather Baines and he) tried first one means, then another, of inducing her large box to occupy *part* only of the box-seat, was not such as

to diminish her love for the whole race of boys. He was tall, slight, and straight, his hair fair, his face frank and good-humoured, his manner—and not to Bridget alone so appearing—particularly pleasant and open. ‘If all my pupils are like this,’ thought Bridget, and wished more than ever that her future charges were to have been the boys of the family.

At last the great box was settled, young Arnold thanked Baines for his help, turned round to hope Miss Storey was not inconvenienced by the carpet-bag, and was so sorry it had been quite impossible to put the box in the back seat; and then cracked his whip, and they were off.

It was a lovely evening of a month which boasts of the sweetest and loveliest mornings, noons, and evenings of the whole year. How fresh, pure, and still the air was, how softly it fanned Bridget’s hot cheeks, and how calmly the pale sun slanted its level beams from out the ‘daffodil sky’ straight into her young eyes. On either side, the hedges full of straggling boughs of fruit-laden blackberries and feathery clematis; beyond, the Malvern Hills, blue and dark.

‘There is Aggesden Church,’ said her companion, at last, ‘that low, square tower in the woods.’

‘Where? Ah! I see,’ and Bridget strained her eyes in trying to make out the vicarage near it; ‘how far off is it still?’

‘Three miles by the road, two in a straight line; we can’t see the house till we get a mile nearer. Sir Hector’s plantations hide it.’

‘Who is Sir Hector?’ Bridget ventured to ask.

'The lord of the manor ; they'll be coming down soon now. Ah ! did you see that pheasant ?'

'No, where ?'

'It's off.' A little pause. 'Do you like the country, Miss Storey ?'

'I don't know anything of it, but I feel sure I shall.'

'It's rather dull on wet days, though,' remarked young Arnold, and then finding old Daisy had taken advantage of his master's distracted attention to drop even his usual jog-trot for a lazy walk, gave his future energies to his driving, and they sped on nearly in silence till they turned from the lonely country lanes into a straggling village. 'Home at last,' said the boy.

Home ? no, just then Bridget felt how truly she was a stranger in a strange place ; her home, the little, unpretending, suburban, London-smoked house in Laurel-terrace.

'There's our house ! That's right, Bill, open the gate,' as a little chubby boy of four, with a sun-bleached head, started off from his cottage-door to fulfil young Master Arnold's commands.

They drove in upon rather a narrow drive, hedged in on either side with evergreens, till within a few yards of a long, low, white house, with a slate roof, tall chimneys, and two small windows on either side of the door.

Bridget felt rather disappointed : this was not the gabled, latticed, porched, creeper-covered building she had been ready to fancy every country parsonage. In truth, such an one as she had imagined had existed till about thirty years ago, when

Dr. Pettigrew, and Queen Anne's bounty combined, had substituted the present more weatherproof and convenient, but far less picturesque frontage in its place.

Three little children standing at the door, apparently on the watch for the pony-carriage, were seized with a sudden fit of rather boisterous shyness, as it drew up, and disappeared into the recesses of the house, where above their tittering laughter was heard a grave 'hush.' Bridget felt herself colour, and saw her companion do the same; however, he jumped down, helped her out, and showed her into the drawing-room, politely enough to make good amends.

'I will tell mamma you are come;' he said, and disappeared also.

Then Bridget felt her heart beat very fast, and her voice grow very thick. How was she to comport herself in the new sphere of life into which she was willing to believe now she had rushed precipitately? How could she pass that long evening, four whole hours, in public amongst a whole family of strangers?

She waited and waited, and was just growing calm again, when a mass of dark hair, a low, broad, little forehead, and a pair of bright eyes appeared suddenly over the sill of one of the two open windows, then it popped down, and there was a titter. How hard a titter is to bear in a dependent situation!

'Come, children, clear away!' said a bright, good-natured voice, and a great pattering of little feet into the house and upstairs preceded the entrance

of a gentleman of about seven-and-forty, of middle height, and good but rather stout figure.

‘How do you do, Miss Storey?’ and he held out his hand frankly, ‘waiting for mamma, eh? but you would be glad to get off your bonnet and have some tea; I will send one of the girls to show you your room. You had a pleasant journey, I hope?’

‘Very, thank you, sir.’

‘And I hope Johnnie proved a good chaperone, and showed off the beauties of the Massing-road. *We* think this a pretty neighbourhood.’

‘Oh yes, sir, it is beautiful.’

‘But its beauties mustn’t make us forget how hungry you must be. We shall be having tea directly—ah!’ as Bridget’s old friend entered, ‘send in some of the girls to show Miss Storey the way to her room.’

John disappeared again, and presently in his stead came a sturdy, thickset, bright-eyed girl of eleven, ‘Ah! Anna, I must introduce you—your second pupil, Miss Storey.’

Bridget held out her hand, wondering no such pleasant and setting-at-ease sentence as would have occurred at once to any governess in her place in fiction, came not to her—that instead, she felt nearly as shy and awkward as the abashed child before her.

‘Well, and now, Anna, show Miss Storey her room, and be her little maid,’ interrupted Mr. Arnold, with opportune good nature, ‘and then tell mamma we’re all dying for tea.’

‘Mamma’s out, papa.’

‘Oh, is she? Well, then, you must tell Mary to make tea in her place, but don’t forget to see Miss Storey has all she wants.’

Anna showed the way up the narrow, shabby, modern stairs with great discreetness, but once safely within Miss Storey’s room, her silence relaxed. ‘It’s very small, you see,’ she said, a little bluntly, ‘but mamma was sure you’d like it best, because you need never be turned out; and if you hear anything strange at nights, it’s only the mice, they do make such a row in this old part of the house.’

Yes, here was a latticed window at last, and the low ceiling and panelled walls Bridget would have desired. What mattered it, therefore, that even the soft western wind, then blowing, created sufficient draught under the door to flap the drugget up and down in little gusts? and that the ivy surrounding those latticed panes was very suggestive of earwigs and spiders? Upon going to the window no wonder such a remembrance never suggested itself, for the view from it was that of the vicarage garden, beyond this one corner of the village churchyard, further still, the Malvern Hills, still, dark, and blue.

‘How lovely!’ said Bridget, unconsciously.

‘Yes, I suppose it is, but we are used to it. Can I help you, Miss Storey?’

Anna proved more willing than handy as a lady’s maid, but that mattered little to Bridget, not used to any maid at all, and only keeping the child to know her a little better, and thus have another friend out of the crowd of unknown faces still awaiting her.

‘ You will come and tell me, please, when tea is ready ?’ she said, in dismissing her.

‘ Oh, yes—or you’ll hear the bell ring.’

Bridget would willingly have employed the intervening time in unpacking, but only the carpet-bag was as yet in her room, and that was soon emptied. Little did she then guess *whose* young hands had carried this upstairs. So this done, she turned to the windows, and sat watching the grey mist stealing over garden and field, and threatening to shut out hills and woods all too soon in damp twilight, when a loud bell broke her reverie, and up she started.

The door opened upon a passage, at noon-day dim, and now quite dark, and Bridget felt about, till miserable and nervous, for the two steep steps she remembered led to the door opening on the modern staircase. It was found at last, and down she hurried, vexed and uncomfortable.

She was soon relieved, however, for only Mr. Arnold and some of the children were as yet in the dining-room.

‘ Mrs. Arnold will be down in a moment ; meanwhile you must make acquaintance with this juvenile host. Let’s see—this is Mary, the eldest ; there’s Frank, the eldest boy—come, Frank, shake hands—Johnnie you know already, and Anna, too,—now then, Carry, Harry, and Robert, come up in a body—ah ! here’s mamma herself.’

Bridget turned round, and in the doorway was already a tall, still elegant woman, from whom, it was easy to see, John inherited his straight, well-built figure, although years and cares were destroy-

ing the youthful uprightness of his mother's, and had given an indolent stoop to the low, graceful shoulders. The indescribable air of easy good-breeding pervading Mrs. Arnold's very aspect filled Bridget with vague awe and admiration.

'I was so sorry I was out when you arrived, Miss Storey ; but I trust my little girls saw you had all you wanted. Pray, sit down ; I am afraid you must be very tired after so long a journey.'

Bridget answered, 'Thank you,' and sat down, gladly, in the seat nearest, her eyes fixed on the little child of four whom Mrs. Arnold was holding by the hand.

'Ah ! still one introduction not made,—little Amabel. Why, my little beauty, not shy ?'

Amabel Arnold well deserved the name of a 'little beauty,' being just such a graceful, sweet-looking thing as her mother must have been at her age. There she stood now, her sweet, delicately-socked-and-shoed little legs thoughtfully crossed, her blue eyes wistful and shy, her long, fair curls hanging on either side of the prettiest little face in the world.

'You will let me shake hands ?' said Bridget, finding herself expected to speak.

Out was held a tiny, slender, plump little hand, and then the blue eyes fixed on Bridget's face,

'I have got *such* a pretty doll !'

'Have you, you darling,' Bridget could not help bursting out, in the midst of all the preceding formality ; 'will you show it me after tea ?'

'Yes !' and the little face was held up for a kiss to seal the compact.

Bridget thought of St. Clair's 'after all, your little child is the only true democrat,' whilst Mr. Arnold thought aloud,—

'Yes, you are a true little 'Amabel,' aren't you? See how seven children carry common-sense names before them—ah, little sweet!' and he took her up in his arms—'as if we could not have hunted up a Mary Anne or Eliza for you!'

'I'm sure, papa, Amabel is much prettier.'

'Well, yes; and she bears the honour very well. Well now, we mustn't forget tea; let me give you some beef, Miss Storey,' and the business of the meal began.

Bridget was happily able to make a very good one, under cover of a long conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Arnold, concerning the sick child whom Mrs. Arnold had been visiting when she arrived. The children, still shy before a stranger, were mostly quiet, Johnnie offering her, as need was, bread, salt, and butter; Frank being told once, rather sharply, 'to be quiet,' when Carry complained of his teasing, whereupon the scowl that passed over the boy's face did not escape Bridget, who, indeed, had nothing better to do than watch her betters. The 'eldest son'—and yet Johnnie seemed to her so completely such, so much more polished for one thing, but, besides, quite as tall, if not taller, and moreover looking so much more like the pride and hope of the family. It was not till the next morning the truth dawned upon the little governess that the two brothers were twins.

Tea over, Mr. Arnold, who with good reason seemed to think *he* had quite done his duty by the

stranger, settled himself into a newspaper three days old, Bridget still Londoner enough to feel astonished at a newspaper of that date possessing the slightest charm for any one, far more the master of a house. The children congregated round the table, some reading, some playing at cribbage or chess, and Mrs. Arnold talked to Bridget pleasantly, but languidly, of her journey—Malvern, Worcestershire in general, etc.—for the first quarter of an hour, and then despatched Amabel for her doll, upon the arrival of which she leant back in her chair, and knitted more languidly even than she had talked, as if thankful to be quiet, and glad to be idle.

Meanwhile the children becoming used to a stranger, remarks, laughs, and retorts, grew of more and more frequent recurrence, as also, 'don't Frank,' 'do leave me alone, Frank'—phrases, in a very few days, as familiar in Bridget's ears as household words.

Suddenly arose a loud 'Now, Frank, that is too bad ;' 'Frank, you shan't. Mamma !'

'What's all this ?' asked Mr. Arnold, looking up from his paper.

'Frank will,' began one.

'Frank wont,' began another.

'Now, Frank, are your lessons ready for to-morrow ?' interposed Mr. Arnold.

'No.'

'Then just go into the study and do them.'

'I don't see why I should if Johnnie doesn't.'

'Johnnie always knows his lessons without being looked after ; you do not,' answered Mr. Arnold, calmly, and resumed his paper.

Frank got up, scowled at Anna, shoved against Amabel on his way out, and nearly knocked her off Bridget's knee. Mrs. Arnold said, languidly, 'Frank, how rude you are,' and he was gone. Justly or not, Bridget was wise enough to feel she could not decide till she knew more of all the parties concerned. She could not help glancing up to see if Johnnie's face bore the slightest symptom of triumph; but it did not, and she turned back to Amabel a little baffled and perplexed.

Presently, Amabel, Robert, and Carry, went off to bed; in half-an-hour or so, Harry and Anna; and, in another half-hour, the three eldest children themselves.

'Ah, Miss Storey,' said Mr. Arnold, with a little sigh of relief when they were gone, 'you will soon discover this is the only peaceful time of the day, and be glad to make the most of it, appreciating it accordingly. Are you too tired, Nancy,' to his wife, 'to give us a little music?'

'Oh no, I dare say not; I will try;' and she rose, whilst he lighted the candles of the old-fashioned, blue-silk fronted piano, opened it for her, and then returned to his arm-chair to enjoy the music in peace. Mrs. Arnold played with taste and feeling, and yet with a little uncertainty, as one who either lacked time or inclination to keep up an accomplishment acquired some sixteen years back. Bridget, however, was far too much afraid her turn would come next to criticise the playing of her hostess, or mistress; she knew not yet in which light to regard her.

But Mrs. Arnold played on uninterruptedly till

the clock struck nine, then rose, said she was very tired, and was meaning to go to bed, and felt quite sure Miss Storey must be longing to do the same ; gave Bridget one bed-candlestick, looked round for another, and not finding it, contentedly took one of the heavy silver candlesticks off the large table ; and showing her young governess to her bedroom, and hoping she had everything she wanted, wished her good night, and left Bridget to her own meditations.

She had meant them to be many and deep, but they were neither one nor the other ; in spite of three several severe attempts to shake off incipient drowsiness, and think well over all that she had seen and heard, before the church-clock struck ten Bridget Storey was fast asleep.



CHAPTER II.

REALITIES.

Come to me, O ye children !
 For I hear you at your play,
 And the questions that perplexed me
 Have vanished quite away.

Ah ! what would the world be to us,
 If the children were no more ?
 We should dread the desert behind us
 Worse than the dark before.

LONGFELLOW.

THE next morning Bridget did not awake till the noise of some one pulling up her blind aroused her.

‘What time is it?’ she asked, springing up at once.

‘Half-past seven, miss;’ and the maid was whisking out of the room full speed.

‘Half-past seven, and breakfast at eight?’

‘Yes, miss,’ answered the girl, still intent on flight.

‘But, my box,’ pursued Bridget, looking round ; ‘will you be so good as to bring it up?’

‘Yes, miss, when cook can help me;’ and Marianne succeeded in effecting her escape.

Bridget sprang out, and dressed with all possible speed, all manner of fears tormenting her. Would she be expected to go down when the clock struck? or wait for the bell? Moreover, would her box be brought up in time for her to get out and put on

something fresher and cooler than the tumbled dress in which she had travelled yesterday? This last point settled itself; no box came, and she was obliged to trust to collar and cuffs for neatness and cleanliness.

The clock struck, and, after a moment's thought, Bridget opened her door, and ventured down stairs; but no one beyond Marianne, laying the cloth, was in the dining-room; and she turned round as if surprised at being thus disturbed.

'Oh you, miss. I am very sorry about your box, but you see we overslept ourselves, and really I never gave it another thought.'

'Never mind, if you will bring it up as soon after breakfast as you can. Is there any breakfast-bell?'

'Oh yes, as soon as mistress is down.'

Bridget went up stairs again, and was not sorry to have quiet possession of the good fifteen minutes which intervened before the bell did ring; and then hastened down stairs to find all assembled.

Mr. Arnold read the second lesson for the day, then the confession, and the collect for the week, concluding with the Lord's prayer, and the blessing. Bridget felt, when she rose from her knees, as if she had but just knelt down; but, before long, she saw how wise such a course was in a household of which so large a proportion were mere children.

'Half-past eight, no time to lose,' said Mr. Arnold, seating himself. 'Come, children, no dawdling. What are you about there, Frank?'

'Only reading my letter.'

'Well, put it by till after breakfast—well, read

it, never mind—only sit down, and get into order. Miss Storey, may I ask you to cut up that loaf?

Bridget complied; whilst Mary asked Frank from which of the Merivales his letter was.

‘What’s that to you?’ returned Frank; and went on with it himself.

‘No letters for any one else?’ asked Mr. Arnold.

‘No, Frank is the only favoured one.’

‘And what’s your news?’ asked Frank’s father.

‘Oh, nothing.’

‘From one of the Merivale’s, eh? When’s Sir Hector coming down?’

‘Hector doesn’t say,’ answered Frank, usually not very communicative, and now greatly affronted.

‘I met Lady Merivale yesterday. She said she was expecting him the end of this week, only for a night or so,’ said Mrs. Arnold.

‘Sad absenteeism,’ remarked her husband, but not as if this much affected him; and having provided one half of his children with breakfast, began his own; and the meal went on quietly till it was over.

‘Well, I am just going to see poor little Patty,’ said Mr. Arnold, as he rose. ‘Now mind, Frank, you are in the way at the half hour;’ and in a minute he trod vigorously past the window on his way to the village.

‘You will like to see the schoolroom, Miss Storey? I will leave your little pupils to introduce and make friends. Perhaps you will like best only to see what they can do now, and not begin lessons regularly till to-morrow. You will wish to unpack, and write home, too, this morning, I dare

say. The post leaves Massing at four, rather inconveniently early. Watkins generally takes our letters.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' answered Bridget ; and followed her future charges.

'This way, Miss Storey ; take care, there are two steps ;' and Mary led the way into the school-room—the room, in fact, immediately under the governess' own bed-room.

It was scrupulously neat ; and though the carpet was well worn, the furniture very old-fashioned and shabby, it looked cheerful and pleasant now, the garden lying bright and sunny outside, and two stately claret-coloured hollyhocks looking in at the window.

'These are our books, Miss Storey ;' and Mary went to the shelves hanging over a veritable old harpsichord.

Bridget, happily alive to the perils of such a book-case, from home use and personal painful experience, took out one or two of its old-fashioned, well (or, at any rate, *hardly*) used volumes ; but so as in no way to imperil its equilibrium.

'You have been used to learning lessons ?' she asked, more from wishing to say something than from any doubt of the answer.

'Oh, yes,' answered Mary.

'No, not always, not for a long time,' whispered Anna, loudly and anxiously, to her elder sister.

'Because mamma has been unwell, and we had no one to teach us,' said Mary, a little despondingly.

She was a tall girl of her age, upright and stiff in figure, although looking sadly as if outgrowing her strength, very neat in hair and dress, and in most things a thorough contrast to bluff, hearty-looking Anna ; a little like her mother in feature, but lacking all her grace ; and while Mrs. Arnold's delicacy made her appearance only the more interesting, her young daughter's face was as yet rendered simply peaking and formal by it.

‘And you like being taught?’ asked Bridget.

‘I want very much to get on,’ was the honest answer.

‘Then we shall do very well. Now, will you let me hear you read a little French?’

In this language Mary proved to be rather forward ; whilst Anna was essentially backward, after every allowance being made for the three years' difference in age. Music and history brought to light much the same result ; although Bridget saw Anna had plenty of sturdy common sense of her own, and meant, before she had done with her, to succeed in turning it on her lessons.

‘Shall we learn any lessons for to-morrow?’ asked Mary, as Bridget was leaving them to go upstairs to write, and then unpack.

‘If you wish it. Will you show me what you learnt last? Don't be afraid, Anna’—seeing the intense dread and dissatisfaction this little girl was undergoing at the very prospect of such an infliction on herself—‘You and I will wait for lessons till to-morrow.’

‘Thank you,’ most heartily ; ‘then I may go?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Now, Anna, mind you don’t go near the pond in that frock,’ said Mary, very elder-sisterly.

‘ Oh ; well, I can take it off now Miss Storey’s seen me clean and decent for once. You know, Mary,’ persuasively, ‘ whether I went near the pond or not, it would be quite dirty before dinner ; it’s only you who can make one last clean a whole week.’

Mary smiled a little complacently ; Bridget was afraid, but agreed to all Anna’s propositions ; and the child went off happy and content.

Bridget went up and wrote her letter home, three long sheets, and wondered if her mother were writing her promised letter to herself at the same time ; and then going to the window to enjoy one more good view of the lovely country prospect before unpacking, beheld Anna very busy on the banks of the pond, which she had not noticed the evening before divided the churchyard and garden.

There she was ! shoes and stockings off, dabbling about as happy as a queen, and at last, turning round eagerly, caught sight of Miss Storey at the window.

‘ Oh, Miss Storey,’ she cried, joyfully, ‘ I have got such a great beauty. I do wish Frank were out of school, I do wish you could see it, but it does hop so ; there, sir, go down there.’ And a great frog splashed from her hand into a great tin can by her side.

Bridget was quite London-bred enough to have no desire to make nearer acquaintance with Anna’s prize ; but who can wonder that the little girl’s

undoubting demand upon her sympathy made the young governess's heart warm and her eyes full? She could never help regarding Anna as her first true friend.

She unpacked and arranged her goods carefully, and had but just tidied herself afterwards, when the dinner bell rang. She ran down at once, but for some five minutes found herself the only occupant of the dining-room except Mary, who had taken the precaution to bring her work with her, and was stitching diligently at a child's frock.

'Is it for one of your little sisters?' Bridget ventured to ask.

'Yes, Amabel; she does grow so fast,' proudly; 'all those I made in the spring are too short.'

'Is she a great favourite?'

'Oh yes, I wish I could do everything for her.'

'Who? little Miss Amabel?' asked a blithe voice. 'Why you do pretty nearly, little woman; you deck her out as you first-born instead of eighth-born, never were yourself. I think if you worked a little less, and ran about a little more, we should have a little more colour in these pale cheeks. Eh, Molly?'

It did Bridget's heart good to hear Mr. Arnold's kind, hearty tones towards his little daughters. She herself had been brought up in a far stiffer, sterner school.

'We can't all be as rosy as Frank and Anna, papa,' answered Mary, freely.

'I wish you could; you and Johnnie don't look half strong enough to please me; how white that boy is to-day, but he declares he's quite well.'

‘Johnnie’s never strong,’ said Mary, sighing.

‘Better than you, Molly, you must allow that. Oh, he does well enough ; you’ve both of you out-grown your strength, that’s all ; mean to be as tall as Merivales both of you, I suppose. Ah, here’s mamma herself, and a tribe of little ones, so there’s some hopes of dinner.’

Large as the tribe looked in a mass, when seated, it was found to have consisted of five instead of seven, and Anna and Frank were still missing.

‘I dare say they’re at the pond, mamma,’ said Carry ; ‘they were when we came in.’

‘How tiresome they are,’ sighed Mrs. Arnold ; ‘they must have heard the bell if you did. Go and tell them to come in at once.’

Out Carry ran, was back herself again in two minutes, and Frank and Anna followed in three more.

‘What have you been about, children ?’

‘Cleaning ourselves,’ answered Anna with every intention of honesty, nevertheless propounding a proposition so hard of belief, judging by external appearances, that Mr. Arnold laughed instead of lecturing.

‘I did not know, ma’am, what I had better do with my letter,’ Bridget ventured to say as the dinner-party broke up. She had looked on the hall table, the mantelpiece, any place likely to be a rendezvous of the family letters to add her own to it, but seeing no trace of a letter anywhere, had put hers in her pocket, and was now emboldened by fear of losing the post altogether to ask information.

‘ Oh, your letter—I am so sorry ; I ought to have told Marianne to ask for it when the butcher came, we have no post-office within three miles. I am so vexed ;’ and Mrs. Arnold looked so.

‘ If you would let me walk, and there is time, I could take it myself.’

‘ Oh, it’s too far for Miss Storey this hot day,’ put in Mr. Arnold ; ‘ one of the boys shall go. Come, Frank, it will be something for you to do this long afternoon.’

‘ Oh no, thank you, sir, I could not think of giving any one so much trouble ; I would much rather go myself.’

‘ But you don’t know the way.’

‘ I came along the Massing road last night, sir.’

‘ Ah, but a good mile is saved by the fields.’

‘ Let me take it down to Billy Stokes, at the gate,’ said Anna, as the idea struck her ; ‘ he’ll go at once.’

‘ Which is more than my own son seems inclined to do,’ said Mr. Arnold, a little vexed ; ‘ so it’s the best plan, Anna.’

Johnnie’s cheek flushed ; he looked at Frank. Frank remained silent, so he spoke out.

‘ Papa, indeed I can take it ; it is not a bit too hot.’

‘ No, it’s too long a walk for you—it’s the old story, most able, least willing—there ; Miss Storey, let Anna take it to the gate for you, and, as she says, *Billy Stokes* will go at once.’

Mr. Arnold walked away ; Bridget felt sorry and uncomfortable, and, very anxious the children should not think she meant to put upon them, de-

clined Anna's outstretched hand, and said, 'she would take it herself to the gate—it would not take a minute.'

'Offended, I suppose,' she had the pleasure of hearing Frank say as she left the room; 'but I'm not going to run *her* errands, I can tell her.'

Poor Bridget, but you must expect many a wilful misapprehension yet.

When she came back, the party had broken up, Frank and Johnnie gone fishing, Anna with them. 'Carry and the little boys are gone for a walk with nurse and Mabel. I thought, Miss Storey, you would like a quiet afternoon after your long journey yesterday,' said Mrs. Arnold, as Bridget ventured into the drawing-room, having taken off her bonnet.

'Thank you, ma'am; I am quite rested, and if I could do——.'

'No, there is nothing for you to do, thank you; on Monday you shall begin in good earnest, better till then learn your pupils' characters a little. Yes, bring your work and sit with me; we shall have quite a quiet afternoon.'

Bridget felt how very kindly this was meant and said, however much more formidable such an afternoon appeared to her than one with all the children collectively.

'You will have rather a tiresome charge, I am afraid,' Mrs. Arnold continued, leaning back in her easy chair, and mending a child's frock, languidly, as she spoke; 'they have been sadly neglected since Miss Marshall left us at Midsummer, and Anna has grown sadly wild and tom-boyish; indeed I

must ask you to keep her as much away from Frank as possible : he is teaching her to be as rough and unpolished as himself. They are both quite too much for me.'

'I am afraid you are not very strong,' Bridget ventured to say, finding herself expected to speak.

'Oh, no ; I have not known a day's real health for years. I was once strong enough—years ago, when I was as young as you,' and Mrs. Arnold smiled her particularly pleasant, graceful smile ; 'they tell me, and I dare say rightly, I abused the gift while I had it. It is such a comfort to me to think I have now one I can so thoroughly trust to rest upon.'

Bridget had never had so graceful a compliment paid her before, and blushed and looked down.

'Perhaps you would be so good as to tell me what you would like me to teach them, and how much I am to do with them,' she was emboldened to ask ; this being a question very near her heart, and one which mentally had been far better turned than put.

'Oh, I am sure you will be a much better judge of their capacity than I am ; pray see that Mary holds up her head and Anna does not sit cross-legged kicking her chair ; otherwise, I am sure I may leave all to you.'

'I have had no experience,' said Bridget, too young yet to know the folly of depreciating herself.

'No, but you will soon gain it ; besides, all your accomplishments are fresh, mine sixteen years old ;' and Mrs. Arnold sighed.

Still, what Bridget most wanted to know remained unanswered, whether she were the responsible person for Mary, Anna, Carry, and Robert out of school as well as in ; whether, for instance, Anna's being in time for meals and appearing at them clean and neat came within her province or not, and, after three minutes' shy silence, she took courage, and said again—

‘ And I suppose, ma'am, I am to look after the young ladies out of school hours ?’

‘ Oh, yes, as much as you can, but don't trouble yourself, they are accustomed to take care of themselves, and to be with children all day is such a tax. I hope we shall often enjoy such quiet afternoons as this.’

Bridget felt very grateful : the question was not very clearly answered, but she should soon see what was expected from her, and do it.

Presently Mr. Arnold came in with a book. ‘ Don't go, Miss Storey,’ as Bridget rose ; ‘ I have been up to the Hall and brought down *The Angel in the House*, Nancy, and came to see if you would like to hear any of it.’

‘ Very much, thank you. Did you hear Sir Hector's movements ?’

‘ Yes ; he comes down to-morrow, Hector and Harry with him, just for a couple of days : a sad pity to have taken those boys to the north deer-stalking when they ought to have been at Latin and Greek, and I shall tell him so. Lady Merivale quite agrees with me.’

Demurely bent as Bridget's eyes were upon her work, her heart beat with no little interest at

hearing a 'Sir' and 'Lady' thus quietly discussed; neither one nor the other had as yet come within her ken.

'I am sure Lady Merivale must have been glad he did not leave them with her; they ought to have been at school long ago.—But Coventry Patmore—yes, sit close to the window, the China roses are so sweet to-day, and we shall hear quite well.'

A most pleasant hour followed, and then came in Frank and Johnnie. 'Ah, my time's up,' said Mr. Arnold, rising; 'I told Frank if he was unpunctual again I'd keep him in till tea-time, so I mustn't keep him *now*—it's barely four, though;' but off he went.

Anna came in next, holding wet dangling petticoats very high, her cheek bonnie and red, her eyes bright with eagerness, the identical tin-can in her hand.

'Oh, mamma, Miss Storey, do look, do just see!'

'My dear Anna, do pray go and tidy yourself; I cannot have those shoes in here. I really must ask Miss Storey to forbid this going out with the boys. You are not fit to be seen.'

Anna retreated, and their next visitors were the little walkers collectively, their hands full of wild flowers.

'Smell, 'tory,' smell,' said little Amabel, putting her bunch with her sweet childish laugh and smile into Bridget's face.

'*Miss Storey*, Mabel; say it after me, *Miss Storey*.'

'M—mif Torey,' heaved Amabel with two separate terrible efforts; 'so sweet! old Mrs. Motts

gave me that wallflower, and Jenny Smiff that r—rose.'

'And wouldn't give me nothink,' said Robert, looking greatly offended still.

Mrs. Arnold looked at Bridget and smiled. 'Two negatives equal an affirmative—no, what is it that I used to learn in the school-room at the Hall? I wonder Robert does not raise Lindley Murray's ghost.'

The evening passed away pleasantly, one hour of it being spent in blind-man's buff with the seven elder children in the school-room. Mr. Arnold had pooh-poohed Anna's entreaty, but Bridget could honestly say she should like it, and she did like it, for she had had no walk for two whole days, and exercise, from habit, had grown essential to her, and now raised her spirits higher than they had been since she left home.

When the children went up to bed she was thoroughly discussed.

'Well,' Anna said, 'she did play capitally at blind-man's buff, and Miss Marshall never played once.'

'It's early times yet,' concluded Frank; 'see if she's as goodnatured one month on.'



CHAPTER III.

A COUNTRY SUNDAY.

Those who are in the habit of remarking such matters must have noticed the passive quiet of an English landscape on Sunday. For my part, there are feelings that visit me in a country church, amid the beautiful serenity of nature, which I experience nowhere else.—*Sketch-book.*

THE first sound Bridget heard the next morning was that of the passing bell. Strange and solemn it sounded in the sweet country stillness ; how different from the same sound mid the clatter, dust, and ceaseless traffic of a London home.

‘Gone,’ said Mr. Arnold, quietly, as his wife and youngest child entered the breakfast room ; ‘ah, my little sweet,’ as he kissed his little daughter, ‘a Christian younger than yourself gone to claim her inheritance.’

Little else but little Patty and her widowed mother and brothers and sisters was talked of during breakfast. Bridget had never yet felt so fully that she was now more or less a member of a clergyman’s family.

‘I don’t mind if Lucy doesn’t catch it,’ said Anna, in a little pause.

‘There is nothing to catch, Anna,’ said Mr. Arnold, at once ; ‘you must go down and see little Lucy, and comfort her ; she was crying sadly when I was there an hour ago.’

Breakfast over, Bridget and her three elder

pupils this time retired to the school-room, and to two good hours' work ; Bridget could not bear to be longer idle, and, to Anna's dismay, set lessons for Monday, that then they might begin quite steadily, Mary having said those learnt the day before with a careful fluency that promised to make tuition so far an easy task to the teacher.

In the afternoon the children did not seem inclined to amuse themselves, and so, when Mr. Arnold came in, book in hand, they were loitering about, teasing their mother and each other alternately. 'Come, clear off,' he said, good-humouredly, 'I and mamma want a little peace—and Miss Storey, too, if the truth be told, I dare say ; don't trouble her any more, Carry, with that decrepit old doll.'

The children turned out rather disconsolately, Carry looking wistfully at Bridget, who could not endure not to fulfil the duties of her situation more than she had yet done, and so took courage to rise and follow them, and as Mr. Arnold did not call her back, hoped he had not thought her rude in losing the rest of the poem in this way.

She proposed a walk, a proposition happily acceptable to three out of the four, and so the majority carried the day, though which favourite walk they should take Miss Storey was a puzzle, which threatened to degenerate into a dispute, until Mary reminded Anna, 'Papa had told her to go and see Lucy Kebbs.'

'Oh, yes, and I do so want to go—Miss Storey, you will wait whilst I gather my apples !'

'But are they ripe, Anna ?' asked Mary.

‘Yes, quite, and three such beauties;’ and away Anna ran.

They were off at last ; though how long a business it is for four children to prepare or be prepared for a walk, Bridget began to learn to her cost ; however, she forgot Carry’s plaintiveness and Robert’s fidgettiness when they emerged from the rather dark drive into the little village, with its green hedges, dotted, whitewashed cottages, red and golden autumn-tinted trees, and sped on, her step and heart as blithe and free as those of any of her charges.

Through some of the Hall woods they brought her home ; through an intentional cut in one of which she caught a circumscribed view of the Hall itself.

‘Why, there’s the dog-cart,’ cried Anna ; ‘yes, Sir Hector was coming home to-day, and isn’t that Harry still on the box ?’

Bridget strained her eyes to see man or boy, but only Anna’s and Robert’s long-seeing eyes could make out more than a dark-looking little mass standing in front of the house.

Bridget longed to ask how old Sir Hector was ? whether Hector and Harry were his sons ? whether Lady Merivale were his wife ? and a world of questions besides, but conscience-stricken that the great interest she felt in the Merivales arose from their rank and position, was ashamed to ask even those she would have liked, and not hesitated to ask, had the object of the children’s excitement been one in her own sphere of life.

‘Well, I am so glad he’s come,’ concluded Anna.

‘Why, you wont see him, Anna,’ said Mary, quietly.

‘Yes, I shall, after church,’ answered Anna, indignantly. ‘And he’s always so good-natured, and then Lady Merivale puts on her best bonnet when he’s here, and they all look so nice.’

‘You shouldn’t look about you in church,’ said Mary, gravely.

‘I can’t help it; besides, I see them outside, too, when they’re waiting for the carriage. I wonder whether they’ll have the carriage to-morrow; papa told Sir Hector last spring he ought to be ashamed to bring it out when he’s good legs of his own, and he laughed, and half promised he wouldn’t next time.’

‘Lady Merivale wasn’t here then; that was what papa meant.’

‘Well, I’m so glad,’ persisted Anna; ‘and I do hope he is going to leave Hector and Harry behind.’

‘Sir Hector has another seat, Pollerton,’ explained Mary, turning like a little woman to Miss Storey; ‘and he generally lives there; that is, when he’s not abroad, or in Scotland, or here. But they all, Lady Agnes and—our cousins, come here for Christmas always.’

‘Lady Agnes is your aunt, then?’

‘No; Sir Hector is mamma’s second cousin. Papa was his tutor, and met mamma at the Hall first.’

Mary’s matter-of-fact explanation cleared up a host of perplexities and seeming contradictions, and threw light on all others; Lady Merivale must be Sir Hector’s mother, Lady Agnes his wife.

‘Sir Hector and Lady Agnes Merivale,’ thought

Bridget, 'what pretty names ;' nor can we think her very far wrong.

Then the children, and Bridget too, fell to nutting, and so enjoyed themselves, that it was five when Bridget looked at the watch her mother had lent her, and she hurried her charges home, sadly afraid that not only Anna but she herself should scarcely be ready for the six o'clock tea ; and in reality, what with the delays of Carry's shoes filling with stones every thirty yards, and Robert dropping behind and saying he was so tired he could not get on, it struck six just as they turned into the garden from the fields.

Mary looked at Bridget, it seemed to her a little reproachfully ; Bridget's cheek and heart, both vexed and hot enough before, grew hotter. However, neither said a word, but the young governess never felt so relieved in her life as to see no token of tea, not a cloth even, upon the dining-table as they passed upstairs, and all were down before tea itself was made, and then Frank was missing.

'That boy's always late for everything,' said Mr. Arnold, impatiently ; 'late for prayers, late for lessons, late for tea ; where did you part with him, Johnnie ?'

'At the farm, at three ; I stayed to practise with the club.'

'So you mean to distinguish yourself at the last match of the season, eh ? so I thought did Frank ; really he bowls uncommonly well.'

'I wish Sir Hector would stay over Tuesday,' said Anna.

'Do you ? we'll try and persuade him ; he's a

host in himself, and really I tremble for our credit if we let Tom Stokes make up our eleven. You have brothers I dare say, Miss Storey, whose hearts are as much given to cricket as my two boys' here.'

'And your own and ours too, papa,' put in Anna, almost anxiously.

'Yes, I believe your second pupil longs to be the eleventh herself.'

'Well, really, papa, I should do better than Tom Stokes.'

'Ah, but what would Lady Agnes say, if Sir Hector told of you?'

'I don't care what *she* says; he wouldn't mind.'

'Well, unfortunately your parents could not agree with him. Ah! here comes Frank; now what makes you so late sir?'

'I don't know.'

'Now, next time, mind, you go without the meal whichever it is you're late for; now, sit down, and make up for lost time.'

Frank obeyed; indeed, seemed to Bridget to eat, having the possibility of no breakfast on the morrow ever before his eyes.

After tea came a whisper of blind-man's buff. 'Do come, Miss Storey.'

'No,' said Mr. Arnold at once, as Bridget seemed half ready to comply; 'there must be some limit set to Miss Storey's goodnature—once a month, or once a week, as she pleases, I will allow you to martyrize her; no oftener.'

'Oh, papa, but she liked it.'

'Enough is as good as a feast,' returned the Vicar; 'no, once a week if she pleases, and will so

do penance, but not oftener. Come, get off with you ;' and they went, not, however, to a very amicable game. Without an elder to guide and inspire them, children's games seem always apt to flag or grow quarrelsome ; and now, before one half-hour was up, Frank had knocked down Robert, trodden on Carry's toes, and torn Mary's frock, whereupon she immediately deserted to mend it ; and every one else found the game stupid work, and followed her example. Thus, some time short of an hour, they were all in the drawing-room again.

Amabel and Robert were sent off to bed at once, Mary began to work, Anna and Carry to play at tactics, Johnnie to read ; whilst Frank looked first over one, then another, sometimes tormenting Carry by pulling out her hindmost pegs to spin as teetotums, sometimes Johnnie, by suddenly putting his hands over his eyes or over his book—persecution borne in patient silence for a longer time than even Bridget's experience of a thoroughly good-natured brother made her believe possible ; at last, however, John got up and took the precaution of settling nearer his father. Carry, having the tormentor all to herself, also lost all forbearance in the sense of wrong, and 'don't, Frank,' 'pray leave me alone, Frank,' became as common words as they had been last night.

'Now, Frank, get something to do,' said Mr. Arnold at last.

'I've got nothing to do.'

'Find something, then. Why can't you be quiet as well as Johnnie?'

Frank made no answer, but, sullenly enough

took up a book, and for a few minutes pretended to read, then recommenced his teasing, and went on with it till it was summarily put an end to by Mr. Arnold boxing his ears and sending him out of the room. Poor Frank was evidently the scapegrace of the family, and even as such, Bridget was inclined to think, hardly used. However, now he was gone, peace reigned once more.

Bridget came in for the end of Mr. Patmore's poem after all the children were sent off, and duly admired and sympathized with Cousin Frederick, scarcely believing Mr. Felix could have been so noble, or at least so *nobly* noble, in the sailor's place; though throughout the reading her pleasure was ever alloyed by the fear of a request for music. None, however, came, for the poem was not ended till half-past nine, and then Mrs. Arnold made the move at once.

'Perhaps,' she said, as she wished Bridget good-night, 'you will not wish always to be so early; and you must remember you can always have lights in the schoolroom, and sit up as long as you like there.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' answered Bridget, heartily; and she fell asleep, wondering why the situation of governess was regarded with such universal pity.

The next day, when she awoke, rain was pouring, the ivy round her window laden with wet, the little pond greatly swollen, and the whole prospect damp and dismal enough. However, before she was dressed, one ray of sunlight had streamed tremulously across the drenched lawn; and before prayers were over, the sun was flooding drive, tree, and

parlour, as if it had never suffered eclipse for a moment.

Bridget's spirits, an hour ago depressed, rose at once. A wet Sunday is, in London, a double misfortune; the day seemed specially to bring home to her all the feelings and doings of those in Laurelt terrace; and she could not have borne to picture John not only walking his country walk *alone*, as they had pictured together, rather tearfully, when arm-in-arm climbing Highgate Hill the Sunday before, but actually losing his walk altogether, and with no music even to cheer him.

'Now, Miss Storey, I want to know if you have any great objection to Sunday-school teaching?' asked Mr. Arnold, as, the urn in, he began rapidly cutting large slices of bread.

'Oh no, sir; I like it so much.'

'In imagination, I suppose you mean?'

'No, sir; I have taught nearly three years now at Islington.'

'Have you, indeed? Well, I shall hope great things, then, from your experience, and make over the first-class girls to you at once. I am sure, mamma, you will be very glad to give it up entirely?'

'Oh yes, Frank; in reality I gave it up a year ago.'

'Yes, Mary has generally been her mother's substitute, and a very good, steady one she has made,' added Mr. Arnold, kindly, seeing Mary looked rather grieved and blank; 'but it is not a good arrangement, either for herself or them, and Mary will be invaluable in a younger class, she has so

much patience ; and, after all, patience is the chief requisite in any teacher, as poor Frank—why, where is Frank ? Wasn't he at prayers, mamma ?

‘ No, I think not ; was he, Mary ?’

‘ No, mamma.’

‘ Go up, Johnnie, and see what's become of him,’ said Mr. Arnold.

John presently came down again, and took his seat without a word.

‘ Well ?’

‘ He says he couldn't be in time ; and as he's to have no breakfast, he thought he needn't come in.’

‘ A message made none the less polite for coming through you, I expect, Johnnie,’ said Mr. Arnold, good-humouredly. ‘ Never mind’—as Johnnie's ready blush rushed into his fair, frank face—‘ we know what a fight truth and courtesy must have had before you softened one word ; and I dare say you've scarcely done more, for it isn't yet very like a speech of your own. Well, then, Harry, take Frank's bread—what ! you, Bobby, want more, too ? What a voracious little vagabond you are !’

‘ Then we'll start at ten minutes to ten,’ said Mr. Arnold, as the party broke up ; ‘ you'll find me in the study if you will knock. Mary, Anna, and Johnnie go too, so there will be no formidable *tête-à-tête* ;’ and he laughed at Bridget's first unconscious look of dismay.

Punctual to a minute, Bridget was in the hall, but was spared the knock, for Mr. Arnold appeared, followed by Mary and Anna, Johnnie and Frank ; and all but the latter started at once.

Across the still sparkling lawn and a little green

lane their way lay, and then they were in the churchyard, its tombstones, moss-grown and slanting as many were, glittering white in the bright sun. Another minute, and they were in the church itself, where, not a little to Bridget's surprise, and pain, too, she found the school was held.

To Mr. Arnold, however, fifteen years' use had made what he, too, had at first regarded as a great evil, quite natural; and he introduced Bridget to her class, wishing she had brightened and returned his first-class girls' shy smiles instead of looking so imperturbably grave.

Then he read prayers, and an hour's schooling followed, during which Bridget's girls repeated the Collect and Gospel, and read and answered questions on these very clearly and reverently, while their broad, curious dialect, broad, sunburnt faces, antiquated bonnets, and short petticoats, filled Bridget with an amazement she could not drive away. How strangely different were these scholars from the delicate-complexioned, fashionably-dressed girls of their age who composed the first class at St. Paul's, Islington!

The signal for dispersion was given by Mr. Arnold's rather loud voice ceasing, and his boys being sent out; then followed those Johnnie undertook; then Mary's and Anna's girls; lastly, Bridget's own, their nail-heeled boots clumping nearly as heavily as their brothers' as they went out, the vicarage party finding boys and girls alike in the lane as they crossed it on their way home.

Mary ran up stairs at once; and when Mr. Arnold called up that it was time to start, came down

Amabel and Robert on either side, the little girl's fair, sweet face, a pretty contrast to Robert's sturdy build and ruddy, sunburnt cheeks ; the others, and their mother, came some few minutes after. Mr. Arnold gave his arm to his wife, and the long procession started.

They entered at the low chancel-door, and took their seats in a square pew, filling the south side of the little chancel. When Bridget raised her eyes, on rising from her knees, she first took in how strangely different this was from any church she had been in yet : a decorated window, with heavy, almost clumsy, mullions, was above her, blocked up half way, however, to shut out the sunlight ; the floor of the pew was slanting ; the atmosphere of the church antiquated and musty ; the western window almost overgrown with ivy ; the pew opposite to, and as large as their own, adorned with brass rods and curtains ; and above it were ranged endless tablets and monuments, some handsome, some insignificant, some old, some modern, but all bearing one name, 'Merivale.' This was all Bridget, where she sat, could see.

Presently Mr. Arnold, followed by the old clerk, passed up to the reading-desk ; and then was struck up the morning hymn in a tone and key that first almost startled her into a scream of horror, and then into a laugh. It was a great help to see the grave and reverent faces of those to whom life-long use made the hymn all the dearer, and nought the less impressive, for the manner in which it was sung. And Bridget found nothing so restored her own

self-possession as joining in it with all her heart, as those around her were doing.

Just as the last line was being sung, there was a rustling of silk, and a quick strong step behind it ; and Bridget's eyes did but follow those of all others in the church in watching the Hall party into their pew ; and although, on remembering herself, she fixed them steadily on her prayer-book, they unconsciously wandered again before long to her opposite neighbours. In one corner was a little old lady, a black silk bonnet shading a sweet, but withered face ; leaning over the rails of the other lolled a tall, fine-looking man, with a handsome, good-natured face, gazing idly into the body of the church, twisting his bright yellow-brown moustache with his fingers. His idle gaze recalled Bridget to a sense that hers was idler ; and she turned her eyes steadily to her book again, resisting a strong inclination to glance first at the two boys' heads, of which she had just caught sight, between Lady Merivale and her son.

It was but just half-past twelve when they followed the Hall party out of the chancel door. Sir Hector turned round at once.

‘ Ah, cousin Anna,’ he said, gaily, ‘ you must undertake to make my peace with Arnold, or I can't undertake to stay and face him. Shocking bad example, I know, and am quite properly penitent, indeed. Ah, Master John’—and he laid his hand heartily on John's shoulder—‘ and how are you ; all right again ?’

‘ Oh yes, uncle, long ago.’

‘Ah, and there’s my little wife, as lovely as ever. Why, Amabel!—not shy of me? Am I so very alarming? Ah well, never mind! well so—I beg your pardon,’ as he brushed against Bridget, in turning back to Mrs. Arnold.

‘Miss Storey, Sir Hector Merivale,’ said Mrs. Arnold.

Sir Hector bowed, and lifted his hat to the poor little governess with a manly grace and ease of which Bridget hitherto had only read; but he relieved her by immediately continuing his sentence to Mrs. Arnold; and whilst his mother talked to Mary and Anna, she had time, at last, to look at the boys.

Strong, bright-eyed, good-looking fellows of twelve and eleven they looked; though Bridget could hardly believe Sir Hector old enough to be the father of a son of twelve. She little thought he was the father of a daughter of eighteen. Frank seemed amazingly friendly with the eldest; and all manner of plans were being already made for the morrow. How they were to be combined with Frank’s morning lessons Bridget could not divine; till Hector interrupted his father, as Mr. Arnold appeared in sight, by saying—

‘Papa, you must get Mr. Arnold to give Frank and Johnnie a holiday to-morrow, our only day, you know.’

‘Oh, yes, of course. I say, Arnold’—but Mr. Arnold passed by the proffered hand to Lady Merivale, saying, and trying to make his tone morose and reproachful—‘No, I am *not* going to shake hands with you.’

‘My dear Arnold! how can I expect respect from my sons if you treat me so before them? Come, I ‘fess, and am sorry;’ so just listen to me—you must give your boys a holiday, and let them spend it at the Hall to-morrow.’

‘No, no.’

‘Why not? Don’t you always tell me my mission here is to spread confusion wherever I go? That’s what I want to do now; and if Nancy will let Anna come and shoot too, so much the better.’

‘Shoot,’ said Johnnie, eagerly; ‘will you really take us with you?’

‘Of course. Come, Arnold, you must say yes.’

‘Well, it seems I must. Now, Lady Merivale, let me give you an arm to the carriage; *you*, I know, do not wish to throw the servants’ dinner late, however indifferent to the consequences of this delay on the punctuality of my afternoon congregation Sir Hector is.’

Mr. Arnold was evidently vexed. Sir Hector looked after him, and whistled a little discontentedly as his old tutor conducted his mother to the pony carriage at the gate. ‘Well, I must be off, or I shall be in another scrape, I fear. Good-bye all. Come, boys, you must ride too, then;’ and off he walked, sprang in, and was off, leaving his sons to scramble in behind where and how they could.

Not a little did Sir Hector and Lady Merivale figure in the long letter that Bridget wrote home the next day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRICKET MATCH.

Cold grew the foggy morn, the day was brief
 Loose on the cherry hung the crimson leaf,
 The dew dwelt ever on the herb ; the wood
 Roar'd with strong blasts, with mighty shower the flood.

CRABBE.

FRANK and Johnnie returned on Monday evening in the highest spirits.

‘As soon as ever Sir Hector heard of the match, he said he must stay for it,’ cried John.

‘And Harry and Hector leave to-morrow all the same?’

‘Oh, no ; they’re to stay and see.’

‘You had better give up your place to one of them, Johnnie,’ said Mrs. Arnold.

‘We did propose it,—it was arranged so once,’ said Johnnie ; ‘but Sir Hector would not hear of it.’

‘Because you were so stupid as to show how it was to be, before him,’ said Frank.

‘Show what?—that *you* were going to give way to the heir of the Hall?’ asked Mr. Arnold, drily.

‘Of course not.’

‘No ; I thought I knew you better. Well, Johnnie, for my part I am heartily glad Sir Hector would *not* hear of it. I don’t see what right the Prince of Wales himself would have to come and cut you out of the Aggesden Club.’

The next day was so bright and fine that, when Mr. Arnold announced at dinner-time Miss Storey must give a half-holiday, that all the girls, and herself too, might go to the field and watch the match, Bridget, in spite of the wish to be thoroughly in work, could not but feel glad. Perhaps one whole day and a half of the lessons of the four children had done something to dispel the brightness of her first imaginings.

The vicarage party took up their position under a spreading old oak in Farmer Maye's famous level field, and talked and laughed till all were assembled and ready for a game almost unknown to Bridget except by name. Just before the wickets were pitched, Sir Hector and his two sons came in sight on horse and pony back; and whilst the two boys joined company with Frank and John, Sir Hector rode on till he reached the Arnold party, and then dismounted, tied his horse to a gate, and shook hands all round.

'Well, Anna, a capital day you've secured for your match,' he said, leaning his hand on Anna's shoulder.

'*My* match, uncle?'

'Yes, I always consider the Aggesden Club under the especial patronage of Miss Anna Maria Arnold: I am sure she watched its infant struggles with a mother's care, and taught her brothers to be cricketers. I can assure you I stayed on purpose to please you, and rode on purpose to prepare for the fabulous number of runs I mean to be mine before the day is out.'

'Yes, I know we shall win now, uncle; and now—'

‘You want a ride on Ajax before the match begins.’

‘Oh, may I?—no, I don’t think, Miss Storey—’

‘Anna, how can you think of such a thing?’ said Mary, much shocked; ‘Sir Hector was only joking.’

‘Sir Hector was quite in earnest, so here goes.’ And he had the little girl on the saddle before she knew the least what he was about, and so she felt at liberty to enjoy herself now she was there; and whilst Bridget trembled for her safety, and yet dared not interfere, felt quite secure and happy, and cantered about to her heart’s content.

When Mrs. Arnold appeared in sight, Sir Hector jumped her down in a moment, retied the bridle, and greeted his cousin with all the *empressement* of yesterday.

‘Ah, and here’s my little wife, too; come, I will have you;’ and he unlocked the little hand tight clasped round her mother’s gown, and lifted Amabel up in his arms. ‘Now, kiss me.’

‘No, I wont.’

‘You shall!—No, I wont let you go to Hector,’ as his son appeared in sight, and Amabel cast a wistful glance at him far below her present level, for Sir Hector was six feet four. ‘My little wife must give me a kiss first.’

‘I wont.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you knockit Hector once.’

‘Knockit? ah!—knockit *once*! a hundred and once you mean; but never once in a lady’s presence, I’m sure.’

‘You did knock him.’

‘Not before my little wife.’

‘I’m *not* your little wife.’

‘And I did not do what you accuse me of,’ said Sir Hector, plaintively; ‘and if you persist that I did, I shall be obliged to borrow my little wife’s handkerchief to wipe away the tears her cruelty has caused.’

Amabel looked up half smiling, half perplexed, a little anxious to see that she had not made Sir Hector cry, though nearly sure he was laughing at her.

‘But oo did?’

‘Hector must have been very naughty indeed, then,’ he said gravely.

‘No, it was oo ouself that was very naughty; you went into great rage, would not let him speak. Hector’s never naughty.’

‘Wheugh, wheugh! more than I ever heard say; however, your description of my proceedings is so like truth, I incline to think your charge is founded, so I ’fess and am sorry. Now, kiss me.’

‘You promise never do it again?’

‘Oh, you cunning little sweet! No, I promise something better,—if you and Hector are of this mind twelve years hence that *his* father shall not come between you.’

There was a bitter earnest in his tone that amazed Bridget, from one whose whole previous talk and tone toward the little child had been so gay and careless.

‘Zoo funny man!’ said Amabel, after a moment’s thought and puzzle, looking wistful and straight into his handsome face.

‘Am I?—there, seal the compact with a kiss

at any rate. Oh, my little sweet, I'd give every daughter I have to have you. Will you come? eat apricots and ride ponies, and be with Hector all day?'

'Zoo funny man!' repeated Amabel, patting his face.

'Then, you wont kiss me?'

'Yes—only you hairs do tickle so,' and she pushed aside his thick moustache with her fair plump little hand, as she gave in all simplicity the kiss about which so much innocent coquetry had been expended.

'There, then; I'll part with them to-morrow, if that will make you let me take you home with me to-morrow.'

'No, no, put me down!' said Amabel, looking much afraid of his riding off with her at once.

Bridget was quite glad to see the little girl by her mother's side once more; she felt as if such evident admiration, such coquetry, however innocent to herself and amusing to spectators, must spoil her more or less.

'Now, Sir Hector, I believe they are waiting for you,' said Mrs. Arnold herself; 'ah, there's Frank coming for you.'

'Then I'm off; 'late for cricket' would be only one degree better than 'late for church;' so good-bye, then. Come Hector, out of the way! There now, Anna, watch my glorious career, and cheer me on to fresh glory.'

He walked off with a bright, light step, and was soon the heart and soul of the match, playing a game the audacity of which spread dismay amongst

the 'sober clodhoppers of Polworth,' as he discourteously termed his opponents, making Anna clap her hands with delight, Mrs. Arnold look excited, and Bridget think him the best runner she had ever seen.

'Too rash!' said Mr. Arnold once when he was standing near them for a few minutes; 'no, he's done it; what a boy he is still, and then pretends to talk cynicism to me!'

'The greatest proof of his being still a boy is being young enough to think melancholy grand,' said Mrs. Arnold. 'Ah! how capitally he hit that; really he'll be down if he will run in that headlong manner. Why, surely that's the Hall pony-carriage coming down the lane!'

'Yes, and that's Lady Merivale's bonnet over the hedge. Ah, she's come down to see the match;' and off Mr. Arnold ran himself to open the gate for her.

Lady Merivale soon drove up to them, made Mrs. Arnold sit beside her, and had little Amabel between them, speaking in so feeble and gentle a voice, neither Bridget nor her charges heard a word that she said, although her coming threw an air of company around her that seemed a little to chill the children's previous hearty enjoyment of the scene, and to confine their remarks and admiration to whispered communications. Her ladyship, however, did not stay long, but drove on, taking Mrs. Arnold away with her to call on Mrs. Kebbs.

Bridget began to grow weary of the game long before any of her charges wanted their tea, which want, however, came to Harry, Carry, Robert, and

Amabel in due time ; and so Bridget took them home, leaving Mary and Anna to take care of each other ; and found, when she returned an hour later, they had done so very effectually, having at least come to no mishap, which was more than all the cricketers could say ; Mr. Arnold coming up shaking his thumb wofully from an antagonist's ball.

The Aggesden eleven were, however, victorious ; and the Vicarage party turned homewards proud and happy. At the gate Sir Hector held out his hand.

‘Oh, you’ll come in and have some supper?’ said Mr. Arnold.

‘No, thank you ;—well, I don’t care ;—no, my mother will be expecting me, I must be off. Say goodbye to Mrs. Arnold for me, and to my little wife ; and tell her next time I go away I mean seriously to carry her off, to show my own girls what beauty really is. Come boys, cut short those adieus !’

He shook his old tutor’s hand heartily, did the same by Mary, kissed Anna to shock the latter, touched his hat to Miss Storey, and strode off whistling as he went.

This was the last Bridget saw for a long time of any of the Merivales, further than old Lady Merivale’s bonnet over the high pew every Sunday morning.

Work within doors now began in good earnest, and very wearisome it often was. How to keep four children, of such different ages, profitably employed, would have puzzled a far more experienced

teacher—rather three, for Mary, Bridget soon found, could be always trusted.’ But say Mary was thus left to the earliest of Tiark’s exercises, Anna set to practise, Carry to write, Robert to read, Mary would knit her brows and trouble no one, nor Anna consciously do so ; she could play through a passage twenty times running with the same mistake without minding, a philosophy Bridget could not attain, and so was fretted all through Robert’s deliberate c-a-t cat, as much by Anna’s contented silence as by Carry’s incessant ‘Miss Storey, do mend my pen ;’ ‘Haven’t I written enough, Miss Storey?’ ‘Oh, my hand does ache so, Miss Storey,’ &c. ; setting aside times when Anna was employed at the table, and so could laugh at Robert’s mistakes, and kick the little feet dangling under the table.

If Mrs. Kendal did not find Gilbert and Lucy a ‘heavy handful,’ Bridget so found her four charges. ‘If they had only been of more congenial ages,’ she thought daily ; ‘or, if only Robert were not upon her hands at all :’ and yet, with her love of boys, this was nearly high treason.

Treason, however, only regarding this one specimen of the race, Frank, John, and Harry she regarded with all the interest and love she had anticipated, at least the first and last ; the first, because she thought him very ill-used and abused by all young and old around him ; the last, because he was a bold, manly little fellow no one could help loving. Johnnie she did not regard with quite her first favour ; it was true he was always pleasant to herself and all others around him (which was more than even she could think of Frank) ; but

she did not see why Frank should be sent out of the room, have gone breakfastless, etc., when John had not been yet subjected to one of these penalties. True, she could not say he had deserved any one of them, still somehow it did not seem fair. If he had not deserved such penalties, in a family where such penalties were to be incurred he ought to have done so.

The end of the first week of tuition was wet and dull, the yellow leaves were beaten down and lay in a sodden mass upon the dreary drive ; and perhaps the aspect of nature accounted more for the kind of depression which seized Bridget on the second Saturday of her duties at Aggesden, than any troubles or grievances encountered within the Vicarage itself.

It was this evening, however, which first brought her feelings regarding Frank into full play. Saturday was a half-holiday, both to girls and boys, and Bridget had rejoiced that about one the rain cleared off, the sun shone, and it was decided all could go out who chose to do so. Bridget herself did not choose, further than taking four brisk turns for duty's sake up and down the drive, and then went up stairs to read and work and enjoy herself, and greatly she did so ; alone, and her window open, the Malvern Hills once more visible, life seemed quite bright again till tea, the last hour being diversified and enlivened by a visit from Amabel and her doll.

When, however, Bridget and her little companion went down to tea matters were not quite so bright ; Mrs. Arnold seemed out of sorts, Mr. Arnold as

much so. The cook had just given the mistress warning, the master had just discovered that through the negligence of his out-of-door man the late rain had damaged his hay ; it was now pouring again, and nothing effectual to remedy the evil could be done before Monday. The dining-room looked untidy and uncomfortable ; Mrs. Arnold's hair was rough, her face listless and worried ; Mary seemed depressed, Carry was whiny, and as they were sitting down to tea revived an old quarrel with Robert as to the right of seat next mamma. Frank was missing.

Bridget was beginning to find that days could be dark and dreary and uncomfortable, without any one exactly knowing why, in a little far-away country parsonage as well as in the confined rooms and atmosphere of Laurel-terrace.

Anna seemed by far the brightest and most at ease of the party ; but on beginning to give a loud detail of her afternoon adventures across the table to Bridget, was told 'not to make so much noise.'

Anna looked a little surprised, but desisted at once, and the silence was almost unbroken till Frank burst into the room bright, fresh, and dripping.

'Oh ! at tea already ?' he began. 'I hadn't an idea——'

'Six was the tea hour,' interrupted his father, drily ; 'it seems not as it is half-past now.'

'I really——'

'Now I tell you what, Frank,' said Mr. Arnold, it seemed to Bridget almost fiercely, 'I will put an end to this. I consider it sheer impertinence in you to be late for tea after what passed only on

Sunday. If missing the meal has no more weight with you than my known wishes had, before, I shall find other means. Every time you are late for a meal, you shall not only miss it, but spend the time on an imposition ; so you may go to the study now, and learn Hamlet's Soliloquy.'

Frank went out banging the door. Mrs. Arnold sighed, ' Really Frank is the most tiresome boy I ever knew ; only to-day I begged him to be in time.'

Mr. Arnold said, shortly and rather triumphantly, ' I believe he thinks to weary me out, but he will find himself mistaken,' and resumed his tea.

This seemed to Bridget such hard measure that at the moment she felt that in Frank's place she would have determined never to be in time for a meal again. He had not been late since that Sunday breakfast ; surely he might at least have been asked (especially considering the last hour's steady fall of rain) whether this unpunctuality were not accidental ? Besides, in a household so radically unpunctual, and where tea itself often was not till nearly half-past six, what good was a reform that did not begin higher ? Moreover—which was the real rankling thought, when Johnnie had been late only the evening before, not only was no excuse even demanded, but that one he offered, interrupted with almost a laugh at his giving one at all, and his wants of tea and bread only the more quickly supplied.

Tea was now by candlelight, and after it was cleared away, work, reading, and games began as usual. Mr. Arnold took up the *Guardian*, which

reached Aggesden when thus four days old, and read it nearly through before he remembered his eldest son and his task.

‘Oh, Frank ! I forgot him,’ he said, as he laid it down ; ‘tell him to come in and say his lesson, Johnnie, if he knows it.’

Bridget could hardly help crying out for mercy ; she could imagine no situation more disagreeable and appalling than that in which Frank would be if he obeyed. Secretly she scarcely believed he could or would.

However he did, repeated the rather long imposition in a mumbling tone, but with no stammering nor hesitation, received no word of commendation, was told again such would always hereafter in like case be his fate, took the book back, and in about ten minutes came in again, *Frank Fairleigh* in his hand.

The table was already rather full, but Bridget made room for him by pushing her own chair nearer Anna’s, whilst (rather late in the day, she thought) Johnnie made room on the other side by drawing nearer his mother. The brothers’ eyes met. Oh ! what a world of smouldering anger there was in that one flash from Frank’s steady brown eyes. Bridget was really rather glad to see it. She saw no more than Frank why one brother should be treated as if not only could he, like the Majesty of England, do no wrong, but far more must do all right, while all the other did seemed as necessarily to be wrong.

CHAPTER V.

FIRST THORNS.

There is no principle in education and in life more sure than this—to stigmatize is to ruin: to take away character is to take away all.—REV. F. W. ROBERTSON.

TIME passed on, and the ways and doings of Aggesden Vicarage lost all novelty and became as matter-of-fact realities in most ways as those of Laurel Terrace. Bridget was beginning to feel that one day amid the tawdry shops and rattling clatter of Islington would be an agreeable variety, when, what she found was considered a great event arrived—an invitation to dinner at a rectory five miles off.

‘The twentieth,’ repeated Mr. Arnold, as his wife finished Mrs. Wills’ note; ‘of course we are disengaged, my dear. Well, so we go.’

‘I suppose so,’ sighed Mrs. Arnold.

‘Oh yes, they’re nice, pleasant people, and really one must meet one’s neighbours sometimes, or become mere Aggesden vegetables. Ah! and perhaps the bride will be there.’

‘Mrs. Hughes? Oh yes, I shall like to meet her; a new face in these parts is a great pleasure.’

‘And such a pretty one—shy, pretty little thing! Marshland Rectory has given its new mistress rather a dreary reception, I fear! We must ask them to come here, my dear.’

‘You forget we keep no dinner company,’ said Mrs. Arnold, with almost the only tone of sharpness that Bridget had ever heard in her voice.

‘No, but I dare say she will come to tea.’

‘Marshland is worth 800*l.* a year. She is a London lady, and wont care to take out carriage and horses to drink tea and eat bread and butter in our shabby rooms.’

‘We will try her, at any rate; indeed, I fancy you are the only woman to her taste she will find about here, and she will want a friend.’

‘Netta and Sophy, when they come at Christmas, will suit her better than an old married woman like myself,’ said Mrs. Arnold, with a little sigh; ‘but at any rate,’ brightening, ‘we shall meet her at the Wills’, and if she is no more formidable than she looks, we will, as you say, try her.’

‘Yes, get her and Hughes by themselves and enjoy ourselves. I feel ten years younger after contact with such modern Cambridge learning.’

‘And I ten years older by her pretty young face. Yes, if they will be sociable neighbours, it will be very pleasant.’

And so with the half regret at losing a pleasant evening at one’s own fireside, and the half pleasure of seeing comparatively new scenes and faces with which most invitations are accepted, was that of Mrs. Wills answered in the affirmative.

‘I am so glad they are going; what fun we shall have,’ said Anna, a little later in the day, to Frank.

‘But *she’s* here to spoil it all.’

‘She’ meant, in Aggesden Vicarage parlance, Bridget Storey, and Bridget heard these words—

very ungrateful words, for she had done Frank many a good turn by this time—mended his balls, heard his lessons, and saved him for two whole days from coming within the shadow of grief, by inducing him to let her teach him cribbage. In fact, Bridget regarded him unconsciously as her *protégé*, her especial charge, and meant to find him a good and pleasant boy at the bottom yet.

Thus his uncourteous speech rather exhilarated than depressed her. She would make the evening of that 20th of November so pleasant to him (as well as the others), he would never wish her away on such occasions again. Thus his speech found more favour in her eyes than Johnnie's rejoinder, as he went whistling up the stairs, 'Oh, but really she never has spoilt anything yet.' It was much more natural to a boy of their age to dislike than like their sisters' governess, and therefore Bridget preferred Frank's speech to John's.

That very evening came a grand to-do. Frank surlily refused to play at cribbage (because his father had noticed his stretching across Bridget for some bread at tea, she firmly believed), and finding nothing else to do in its place, began as usual to tease and pester those around him. To-night, at the very first 'Don't Frank,' Mr. Arnold looked up,

'Frank!'

'Yes,' answered Frank, sullenly, finding an answer expected.

'Now mind, the next time I hear that wearisome 'Don't Frank!' you go up to bed that minute.'

For ten minutes it did not come, then it did, and

from Johnnie ; now Carry or Robert might have been forgiven for letting it escape them, but Johnnie *was* old enough to have his tongue under control. Perhaps Bridget forgot Frank was equally old, and so might have expended his wits on something better than in every possible way interfering with his quieter-minded brother's reading.

'Now, sir, upstairs this minute ;' and up Frank went, whilst Mr. Arnold rose himself and poked the fire with no little vehemence.

'Really, I don't know what to do with the boy ; vexatious, tiresome fellow ! why cannot he be quiet for one hour in the day, like the others ?'

'Why does not some one find some employment for him ?' was Bridget's question to herself, as Mr. Arnold, with his own unanswered, sat down again. 'Who can be quiet with nothing to do ?' And she glanced rather indignantly at Mrs. Arnold, who was reading as quietly as if nothing whatever had befallen her eldest son, or she herself were responsible in any way for any idleness which had preceded it. After all, woman-like, Bridget was more ready to blame the mother than the father ; it might be the father's duty to repress and punish, harshly as she thought Mr. Arnold did this duty, and she certainly honoured and esteemed him more and more as she found how invariably his least word met with obedience, but surely Frank's mother might have taken a little pains to prevent such collisions ; might have felt for him a little when they did take place. What consternation there would have been if Johnnie had been thus sent off ! but as it was 'only Frank,' no one cared about it. No

doubt Johnnie had the best disposition, but, surely, to a mother, the very fact of Frank's being a less pleasant and happy one should have made him doubly dear.

And thus Bridget first began to find any positive fault with the Vicar and his wife, whilst they innocently went their own way, little thinking she so curiously scanned their words and ways, never remembering that any stranger thrust into the midst of a large family party could not fail to watch the development of each character with interest.

The evening of the twentieth arrived, and the moon was already rising behind the churchyard, when Mrs. Arnold left the comfortable parlour fire to prepare for Mrs. Wills' dinner-party. Had sixteen people that morning arisen feeling something disagreeable was to be got through before they could go to bed again? No; not quite so many had done this, though sixteen was the number Mrs. Wills' table held, for Mr. Arnold, at least, was looking forward to meeting fresh minds with real and amused pleasure.

With Mrs. Arnold it was different; all the exertion to be gone through before she was at rest again is to those of her temperament far more fatiguing and disagreeable in imagination than in reality; and thus she crept up to dress very reluctantly, and not till her husband had four times said, 'My dear, you will never be in time if you are not getting on.'

Mary went up to help her mother, and through her contrivance Mrs. Arnold returned to the parlour before the pony-carriage had come round, and also

un-shawled and un-bonnetted. Mary wanted Miss Storey to see her mother dressed, and Bridget's shy but honest looks of admiration delighted the girl's heart greatly, secretly ; *secretly*, for nothing could be more quiet and indifferent than the demeanour she assumed.

It was indeed strange to look down on the worn carpets and up to the faded walls, and think this elegant, high-bred, unconscious woman boasted no better drawing-room, when, to Bridget's eyes, she would have become a palace, would have filled the part of royalty as easily as that of wife to a country vicar.

Mr. Arnold eyed her with open pleasure and admiration.

'Ah, Nancy, never you talk of being an old woman yet ! Who would think you were mother of that tall, over-grown girl there, or of those great boys either ?'

'What, don't I look a matron yet ?'

'Scarcely mother of eight children, as you are. No, Nancy, we shall pass for quite a young couple for a year or two, even now. Well ! there's the carriage ; you're well wrapped up ? That's right, Mary,' as Mary laid the warm wrapping shawl she had been holding on her arm over her mother's fair, sloping shoulders, and pinned it tight and carefully.

'I hope you'll all have a pleasant evening : where's Frank ?'

'In the hall, papa.'

'Ah, yes ! Now, Frank, mind, I put you on your good behaviour. I hope you wont find him

very troublesome, Miss Storey ; if you do send him off. Good night, Mary, good night, my little sweet, some day I shall be taking you out as proudly as I do mamma.'

'In the carriage and all?'

'Carriage and all, if my four sons have not run away with it long before ; if so, in galoshes instead. Good night, my own darling.' Amabel was set down, the Vicar handed his wife into the carriage, wrapped her up carefully before mounting by her side, and drove off.

Poor Frank ! Poor Bridget ! They seemed at once left at daggers drawn, never had any speech seemed so *mal-à-propos*, and Bridget took Frank's ungracious shove before her into the drawing-room as an amends to his wounded pride.

'Let's sit round and be jolly till tea,' said Johnnie, sitting down himself with his back against the mantelpiece.

'Mabel, come to me ;' and the little girl was soon supremely happy on his knees.

'I don't see why we shouldn't have tea at once,' said Frank.

'It's only half-past five,' said Mary.

'Well, but we can do as we like, I suppose, and I want mine now.'

'Oh, we'd better wait till the right time!' said Johnnie ; 'besides, this time before candles is so pleasant.'

'I don't see anything pleasant in it.'

'But you know, Frank, you do nothing when candles do come, so it can't signify to you,' said Mary, in a vexed tone.

‘But it does ; and if I choose to have tea now, why shouldn’t we ? I’m eldest.’

‘No,’ said Mary, conclusively, while Bridget felt very uncomfortable.

‘Oh, *you’re* nothing ; only a girl.’

‘But it is for Miss Storey to say when we shall have tea,’ said Mary, with dignity, and very good feeling too.

‘She ?—only a governess !’

‘For shame, Frank !’ cried Anna ; ‘how can you ?’ while Johnnie, little man of the world as he was, even whilst the words were being uttered turned to Bridget and asked a question that demanded an answer, hoping thus to divert her attention and let the rudeness at least pass unperceived, hot as it made his own cheek.

‘Now, Frank, don’t go and make everything disagreeable,’ cried Caroline, piteous and plaintive.

‘I don’t see why tea should make any one disagreeable, so I shall ring for it.’

This was too much. One moment Bridget hesitated, insecure of her position and its rights, but only one ; if Mr. Arnold had left her power to send his son out of the room, he had certainly justified her in stopping this impertinence, and so, hot at heart and cool outwardly, to Frank’s and every one’s surprise, Bridget rose, laid her hand on his arm, and said firmly, though her voice trembled, ‘Frank, I forbid your ringing.’

‘Forbid ? What have you got to do with me ?’ said Frank, disdainfully.

‘Nothing whatever when your father is at home,’

answered Bridget, quietly; 'but when he and your mother are both out, I have the right to prevent——'

'Right?' interrupted Frank, contemptuously, but desisting from his design, 'if you mean to make yourself so disagreeable we'll soon——'

'I have no wish to argue,' said Bridget, good-humouredly; 'as Mary says it is for me to order tea, I will willingly do so, if the others do not care about it. I would have offered at once to do so, had I not thought Mary had been accustomed to take Mrs. Arnold's place. Shall you mind my ringing for tea?' she ended, looking round.

No one answered, so she took silence for consent and rang, thinking all pleasantness and comfort, before some change had been given to the thoughts of all, was impossible.

Tea came in after some delay; the water had not boiled, Marianne grumbled in the kitchen at the governess altering hours, the cook would not go to the outhouse in the cold to bring in more wood to quicken the kettle's boiling, and so the clock had struck six before the party at Aggesden Vicarage, after all, sat down to tea. Let us hope the faces round Mrs. Wills' dining-table were rather blither and happier than those round the Vicarage tea-table just then.

Tea, however, did, as Bridget hoped, soon brighten all. Anna was very happy and busy dividing an apple pasty she had coaxed the cook into letting her make for tea; Harry, Robert, and Carry greatly approved of the jam that always celebrated papa's and mamma's being out; and

Johnnie willingly responded to Bridget's efforts to be bright and sociable. Indeed, but for Mary's grave face and Frank's sullen one, all soon would have been perfectly natural and happy.

After tea, Annie petitioned for blind-man's buff, and Bridget willingly assenting, up they went to the nursery, and had an hour's game, which the governess was happily young enough to enjoy as much as her pupils, and thus, by the time it was over, the little sore rankling in her heart at Frank's rude speeches, the worst of which, in spite of Johnnie's politeness, she *had* heard (do such speeches ever escape *unheard*?) had happily evaporated.

Frank, however, had not had the same excitement and wiping out of wrongs; he had been asked to play by Anna, but would not come, and when they returned to the drawing-room his solitary hour had not improved his temper; the only outward fruit of it was that he had harnessed Carry's kitten to an old wooden cart of Robert's, so it assailed its mistress with a repetition of the piteous mews which had fallen quite unheeded on Frank's own ear.

'Oh, Frank! how can you? Frank, how cruel you are! do give it me! you shall! I will tell papa.'

'You'd better tell Miss Storey, as she says she's in papa's place to-night,' retorted Frank, disdainfully, still hissing the little thing on, and laughing alike at its tumbles and its mews.

'Miss Storey will be very much obliged if you will act like a sensible good-natured boy,' said Bridget, trying to stop the warfare at once, 'and

help her to make the evening pleasant to the little ones.'

'Little plagues,' answered Frank.

'Now, Frank,' she said, venturing to lay her hand on his shoulder, 'you can't look me in the face and tell me you wish to spoil every one's pleasure to-night. No, I knew you couldn't ; so mind, henceforth I shall expect you not to treat me as an enemy.'

This was the best way of meeting such a temper as Frank's, and perhaps would have succeeded, if Carry had not cried out, 'There, you hear, Miss Storey says you're not to spoil our pleasure, so you must let my kitten go.'

Frank turned round, doubtful what to do or say, and found John had already unloosed the kitten.

'You've no business to interfere,' said he, fiercely.

'I haven't interfered. The cat was Carry's, the cart Robert's, and the string my own ;' and Johnnie quietly put the last into his pocket.

Frank glared at him, and unfortunately Bridget was so amused and surprised at Johnnie's cool promptness as to smile ; and from that moment Frank was determined to make her repent laughing at his discomfiture. And he succeeded, or at any rate vexed her to the heart, and made her more wretched than she had ever been in her life.

One rude or defiant speech, borne patiently and in silence, followed another, till suddenly, to every one's consternation, Bridget burst into tears and ran out of the room. The governess was but flesh and blood and only a novice in her profession, or she would not have behaved with so little dignity.

‘You great brute,’ said John, looking very fierce.

‘I shall tell papa the first thing to-morrow,’ said Mary, white with indignation and looking very determined.

‘Oh, Frank! how can you be so unkind to her when she’s always been so good to you?’ cried Anna, ready to cry herself. To all which Frank returned nothing. He had beaten his enemy off the ground she had declared her own, and was content.

Anna went after her ‘dear Miss Storey,’ as she called Bridget again and again, with her arms round her governess’s neck, but Bridget was ashamed to return and face her foe with red eyes and swollen features. Oh, how angry she was at each of those hot, bitter tears! It was nearly nine; Anna finding Bridget not to be persuaded, wished her good-night, and when she returned and told her ill success, she, Mary, and Johnnie prepared to go up to bed at once.

‘I knew she’d spoil our whole evening,’ said Frank.

‘We all know who *has* spoiled this evening, and every other,’ sighed Mary, taking up her candle.

‘Little sneak! to give up with a cry, dear baby!’

‘We shall see to-morrow whether papa will allow a lady to be so treated in his house,’ retorted Mary.

‘A lady? Some candlestick-maker’s daughter, I daresay. Just see her beside mother!’

‘I should be sorry to see any one like mamma a governess.’

‘There, you can’t pretend she is a lady.’

‘At any rate,’ said Johnnie, ‘she is a woman, and

if you'd been a gentleman, you would not have spoken to a kitchen-maid so.'

'Well, she should have minded her own business.' This was the last word, for here Mary and Johnnie left the room together, not caring to argue the point further.

Bridget came down the next morning with only one happy thought, that neither Mr. Arnold nor his wife would ever hear of her childish behaviour the night before. She little thought what line of conduct Frank had prescribed for her, or the line Mary fully meant to take, and did take, in spite of Anna's piteous entreaties, as soon as ever breakfast was over.

'No, Anna, I shall tell. Frank thinks Miss Storey will, but she will not, I feel sure ; and do you think she is to be so treated, poor thing, the instant papa and mamma are out ?'

'But I will make him promise never to behave so again.'

'Promise ! whether he promises or not, you must know he will only behave ten times worse next time if he escapes scot free this.'

'But papa will be so angry.'

'I hope he will. I used to be rather glad when Frank affronted Miss Marshall, she was always so uppish and on the look-out for affronts, but Miss Storey has no such airs, and I won't let her kindness be so imposed upon.'

And so Mary told, and very angry Mr. Arnold was. Frank had the alternative of an apology or a severe imposition, and we need not say which he

chose to incur, especially after the sharp lecture already administered. And thus henceforth Frank hated the governess, and thus was Bridget cured of her liking for him. She found, as many have done before her, that unnecessarily depreciated and ill-used as one member of a family may seem to the eye of a stranger, his own family know him far better than any stranger can, and it is very seldom he has not found his own level, does not meet with what the acquaintance of years has proved his desert, hard as that desert may be. Frank never apologized by word or look, and Bridget never again regarded him as her *protégé*; nevertheless she tried hard to be, and soon was, as willing to help and oblige him as if the rudeness of November the 20th had never occurred.

Not but that the entrance of some new member into a family where such a person as a Frank exists is the best chance ever given him of brightening and reformation. To have some one about willing as yet to believe them at least well-intentioned and only wanting opportunity to appear in a pleasanter light, is a great help towards being well-intentioned, and a great incitement to wish to be pleasant; things almost impossible so long as the whole of those surrounding him have given up all hope of such improvement long ago, and so even if a step in the right direction were made, would almost feel, coming from him, that it must be wrong.

If Bridget had been a cousin or sister-in-law, anything but a governess, Frank could not, after a time, have helped being grateful to her, and gradually

attaching himself to one wishing to believe him right till proved wrong ; but unfortunately she was, instead, only his sisters' governess.

Bridget would not have been much comforted if she could have heard the short conversation which took place between Mr. and Mrs. Arnold on the subject after the boys' lessons were over.

'Really,' said the Vicar, when he had concluded his narration, 'I never suspected even Frank of being half as unkind, setting aside the ill-breeding, sending the poor thing out of the room in tears.'

'But some women cry at nothing—you know tears are "women's weapons ;"' and Mrs. Arnold smiled.

'Ah, but Miss Storey is not given to tears or to complaints. I believe I should never have heard a word of the business if Mary had not told me.'

'Well, I am glad she did tell, for really Frank seems to grow ruder every day ; but Miss Storey ought to have had spirit enough not to have let herself be sent off in tears.'

'Certainly Miss Marshall would never have beaten such a retreat ;' and the Vicar smiled this time ; 'but poor Bridget Storey is so very young and inexperienced.'

'Well, but when you had left her power to send Frank out of the room, she ought to have used it the first time he offered her any rudeness at all, and then all the fatal after-occurrences would have been spared herself and Frank.'

'Yes, it would have been much better ; immediate firmness is the only thing that tells with Frank, and she will find it out very soon, if this have not

taught it her already. I wish that boy could go to school.'

'If either could, it should be Johnnie,' said Mrs. Arnold, her cheek flushing with eagerness, 'so fitted as he is to distinguish himself, and to make friends and get on, wherever placed. It is so hard to be kept at home, as he is.'

'Yes ;' and the Vicar uttered one of his rare deep sighs ; 'but Frank is the eldest, and I think going to school is even more essential to him than Johnnie, —would do him a world of good, if only in making him love his home. Ah, Nancy, I ought to have remembered the possibility of having eight children, four of them sons, before I asked you to marry me on a living of 400*l.* a-year !'

'Frank !' cried his wife, rising quickly and standing by him, so radiant with affection that she looked far lovelier than when Bridget had so admired her the night before, 'how can you say such things ? You know if you had not married me on 400*l.* a-year, you would have broken my heart, and you know how broken hearts end in our family.'

'Poor Emily !'

'Poor Emily !' repeated Mrs. Arnold, her eyes bright too with something sadder than love ; 'yet Sir John was right, I still say so, I can indeed ; but why did they have us there at all ?'

'Sir Hector cannot say so yet.'

'No, I don't want *him* to say so. But—oh, dear ! there is no use in raking up old troubles of twenty years ago.'

'Except that our own grow little by comparison.'

‘Yes, you are bright again. Dear Frank, I would give anything to have your cheerful temper. I’m sure if I were Frank, I’d rather be beaten by you than looked at by one so fretful and peevish as I let troubles make me.’

‘It is that incessant scolding and punishing so vexes me. How can I expect the boy to love me or to be open to me, whilst Johnnie——’

‘Was born to be our pride and glory, Frank.’

‘A comfort for every vexation, I often think ; the very sight of his frank, bright face, or the sound of his merry whistle, seems to make the house another thing. Ah, there he goes, gun in hand !’ as the boy passed the window.

‘Don’t you think he is a little young to be trusted so entirely by himself with it? Sir Hector, I remember, was not allowed to go out without——’

‘Ah, but Sir Hector was eldest son and heir, and had endless gamekeepers at his beck and call. No ; I like to see the dear fellow so bold and manly. God bless him !’

And as Mary entered the dining-room, Mr. Arnold left it to cross to the study, where he had left Frank over a returned exercise. Not that Frank was at all wanting in ability or in tolerable industry, simply in all care of pleasing. He did not raise his eyes now when his father entered, but Mr. Arnold went up to him and laid his hand kindly on his shoulder.

‘Look here, Frank, I’ve punished you enough for to-day ; put by those books and go out to John ; he’s off shooting. Yes, put them all away—and now one word. My dear boy, if you would conquer

your pride enough to apologize to Miss Storey, surely it would be a starting-point for good in your whole life, and one from which you and I might make a new start ourselves.'

Frank had shut up his books and risen, but made no answer.

'Well, I wish you would ; it is indeed no more than your duty. But I did not come to lecture you again, so there, I will say no more about it.'

And Frank went, and Mr. Arnold was left sad and heavy-hearted.



CHAPTER VI.

TEA AND TROUBLE.

‘There dined with me Sir William Batton and his lady and daughter, . . . the first dinner I have made since I came hither. This cost me above 5*l.*; and merry we were, only my chimney smokes. To bed, being glad that the trouble is over.’—PEPYS’ *Diary*, 1660–1.

A WEEK’S sharp frost followed, reminding all that winter was near, and on one of these days Mary went with Mr. and Mrs. Arnold into Worcester, to buy winter frocks for herself and three younger sisters. They were absent from ten to four, but this time Bridget and her young charges went on very amicably.

The next day, the governess, Mary, and Anna walked into the outskirts of Massing, to tell a work-woman to come and make up the new purchases, and in the dusk, as Bridget was still trying to read by the fading light, Mary came in with a request which she was evidently rather shy of making.

‘Can I do anything for you, Mary?’

‘I was wondering—I suppose, Miss Storey, you do not know anything of dress-making?’

‘Yes, I know something. At least enough to make my own and my mother’s dresses.’

‘Do you? then you could help me,’ said Mary, brightening. ‘I do so want to cut out my own and Anna’s dresses before Mrs. Wilkins comes; she

does do them so carelessly, and last summer put one of the backs upside down in each. I have cut a pattern from our cotton frocks, but I was afraid to cut the check out by it without knowing whether it would come right.'

'Have you cut a front too? Will you let me try it on?'

'Oh, if you would.'

'Directly,' said Bridget, laying down her book, always glad to have an opportunity, which was very seldom the case, of helping Mary, her burden of life seemed so heavy, or at least so heavily borne for so young a girl.

'Oh, thank you, then I will bring a candle and my patterns.'

'Or cannot I come to you?'

'I am in the nursery, and the table is so small, I could hardly manage. I will bring it all here directly.'

And Mary did, and very skilful Bridget found her first essay in pattern-cutting had been. She had borne in mind how constant washing had stretched the print from its original straightness, and only forgotten the need of future turnings-in.

Mary watched Bridget's movements and cuttings narrowly, and when the pattern the governess cut was fitted on the girl, and taken in here and let out there till it fitted ten times better than any Mrs. Wilkins had ever made, Mary was quite delighted.

'Then I may cut out the check just like that?'

'Yes, only I shall cut a paper pattern for you from it first, so that you may have it always ready,

though I am afraid you grow too fast for any pattern to be of use to you long.'

'I don't think I grow much now,' said Mary, a little dejectedly.

'Well, you are nearly tall enough, taller than I am.'

'Ah, but I want to be as tall as Cousin Netta, or at least as mamma—all the Merivales are tall,' with a little premature dignity that Bridget had observed once or twice before; 'but you want some more pins,' and she ran away, a child, or perhaps a woman again.

That same evening brought the question of asking Mr. and Mrs. Hughes forward once more, and after some debating, half-proud, half-indolent reluctance on Mrs. Arnold's part, and good-humoured overbearance on her husband's, a note was written, asking them to spend the evening at Aggesden Vicarage on that day week.

'I can't think, Frank, why you want to bring poor Mr. Hughes and his wife five miles to meet no one but ourselves,' said Mrs. Arnold, even when sealing her note.

'First, my love, they are not poor at all, and have a carriage they can close if they please; secondly, I want to show my wife to Hughes, and think he may like to show his to me; thirdly, if we don't have people to meet them, it is not my fault, I am willing.'

'We've no one fit to meet them.'

'Oh, is that all? I thought it was want of maids and best teacups; then have the Merivales, they come down next Friday.'

'Thank you.'

‘Why? not good enough? or what’s the matter?’

Mr. Arnold eyed his wife a little keenly and mischievously, his wife him a little reproachfully, till she broke into a smile and answered,

‘Surely Lady Agnes may patronize us by having us to the Hall at least six weeks before we need trouble ourselves to think of asking them in return—no, we need not think of the Merivales till February; I daresay we can get through the Hughes evening pretty well; Miss Storey will be good enough to sing, and Mary can play, I suppose, by this time.’

‘And perhaps Mrs. Arnold may be induced to favour us with a song before the evening is over.’

‘She must feel very differently then to what she does now. Well, who’s to take the note; can Thomas be spared to-morrow?’

‘Oh no, impossible; he’s as busy on the farm as can be. Johnnie will walk over with it, I daresay.’

‘Yes, papa,’ and the note was consigned to his care.

‘No need to tell you not to forget it, is there, my boy?’ said Mr. Arnold, just looking up from his writing, and laying his hand with the confiding, affectionate gesture which he often used towards this son for one moment upon the boy’s shoulder.

Bridget still pitied Frank’s scowl, but did not now forget how much more sullen it would have been, had he been told to take the note instead of his brother.

The next day it was pouring again, but a half holiday, and very soon after dinner Johnnie appeared cap in hand at the drawing-room door to

know if he could do anything for any one at Massing on his way.

‘Johnnie, you are not going such a day as this?’ said his mother.

‘Oh yes, mamma, it won’t hurt, I’ve got papa’s waterproof.’

‘Still, you’ll get very wet.’

‘Oh, mamma, papa made no objection, and I was glad to have something to oblige me to go out.’

‘Come here, let me see;’ as he obeyed, ‘yes, you have good boots, but I am sure the note might just as well go by post.’

‘It would be two days on the road, mother.’

‘Well, so you want to go? give me a kiss then. There, you’re a silly fellow, but if papa doesn’t mind, I mustn’t.’

‘Why should you, mamma?—you don’t really?’ turning back.

‘No, no, go off and be happy; only don’t ask me to go with you, there good-bye.’

‘But——’

‘No, papa likes you to be hardy, and would be quite vexed if he knew I had thrown a shadow of doubt in the way. Sometimes I think he won’t be satisfied till he’s let you kill yourself.’

‘Not with getting wet through, for I really shan’t; but I’ll take an umbrella to satisfy you, mother. Good bye, I shall be back before tea. I want to see if I can’t do it in two hours;’ and he was off, trudging by the window the next minute as merrily as if he wished for no better lot than carrying a note five miles in pouring rain.

Truly such a temper must be innate—can hardly

be attained. Frank watched him rejoicing he was not in his place, but by the fire,—yet envying the spirit John carried with him sufficiently to make him cross and snappish to the little ones when they next came in his way.

John did not, however, come in till half-past five, for he had met Mr. Hughes in the churchyard returning from a funeral, and he had insisted on bringing him to see his wife and his dog, and have some cake and wine.

‘Did they take you for a baby?’ asked Frank, more amused than ill-natured.

‘Took me, perhaps, for being rather cold and hungry, as I was ; and they looked so comfortable, mother, a great blazing fire, and such a jolly room, with oak walls and full of pictures, and Mrs. Hughes sitting reading, with the great Newfoundland at her feet. He is such a beauty ; and do you know Mrs. Hughes promised me one of the puppies, and asked us to come over and see them as often as we like.’

‘Who ? you and your mother ?’

‘No, no, papa, Frank ; and he said something about there having been such first-rate skating on the river between them and Massing, and when I told him we had skated up to his hedge last Saturday, he said next time we must come in and have luncheon, and he’d skate back with us to tea.’

‘But what will your company-hating mother say ?’

‘That all John’s friends are welcome,’ said Mrs. Arnold laughing, and graciously bowing ; ‘so you have become great friends ?’

‘Yes, one could not help it, he seemed a friend in a minute, he shook my hand so, and would have me come in, and Mrs. Hughes is so pretty and little, he seemed like a great lion beside her, and he crickets, and skates, and everything.’

‘Eton and King’s all over. Well he has as good a river as the Cam here. But come, John, you don’t think you’re going to sit down to tea in those wet things, do you? up with you, and be quick too, for we stay-at-homes have grown prematurely weary, and want our teas already.’

John gave his mother the answer and hastened away.

‘Do they come?’

‘Yes. Well I am quite glad. Johnnie makes them out such charming people. It is a very friendly note,’ and Mrs. Arnold passed it to her husband.

‘Ah! Mrs. Hughes has won your heart by her hopes that your son will not suffer from braving such rain on their account.—Pooh! a ducking now and then does a boy good.’

‘Well we wont argue the point again. But it’s a good note, and a good hand too, more character in it than I expected from so quiet, shy a woman.’

‘And now really, my dear, don’t you think we might as well have the Hiltons to meet them?’

‘Oh Frank!’

‘Well, I’m sure we were there last, and Mr. Hilton enjoys a little life, and his daughters must be sadly moped, poor things.’

‘Oh, no indeed. Have them some other time, if you please. We need not present the Hiltons as specimens of our friends, for they are not.’

‘Well, have some one—leave Lady Agnes alone if you like, but ask Sir Hector and Netta, they will certainly be the finest specimens of friends we can produce.’

‘My dear Frank, do you think Miss Merivale will thank us for bringing her to our little rooms and dull society after all her London and Brighton gaieties?’

‘Oh I don’t know anything about Miss Merivale, I don’t want any such formidable person any more than yourself, but Netta will sing, and look charming, and be invaluable.’

‘Not in such an evening as ours will be.’

‘Yes she will; she is the most good-natured of beauties; and even if she were not, could not help *looking* charming.’

‘Well, but Frank, what does settle it is, that I told Mrs. Hughes we asked them to meet only a family party.’

‘Well—and so it would be.’

‘Not at all; do please let it be.’

And it was let be, rather to Bridget’s disappointment, if no one else’s.

The day arrived at last. It was bright and fine, and a half-holiday. Very busily did Mary employ it. Sewing new strings in her mother’s cap, mending her bracelet, taking a grease spot out of her grey silk—all this done unseen, almost unknown, even to her mother, upstairs in the cold. Then, on went her hat, shawl, and galoshes, and she searched the garden for lingering roses and geraniums, and found red and pink enough to contrast very prettily with the white laurestinus just bursting into blos-

som. It was now four, and nearly dark ; she watched Bridget safely settled in the dining-room, telling stories to the little ones round the fire, and then diving into the low, damp, old-fashioned kitchen, found a tea-tray, with cups, saucers, plates, and spoons, and carried it into the schoolroom, and laid, with her slender, Merivale hands, the schoolroom tea. Why ? may those uninitiated in poor households, or worse, ill-servanted households, ask ; because if thus all were not placed tidily and neatly by herself, she knew by painful experience how flurried and hurried Marianne, on even the simple occasion of one gentleman and lady coming to tea, would become—how anything would be thought good enough for the schoolroom—cracked plates, dusty cups, a knife or two short—and how awry and crooked these insufficient paraphernalia would be placed. Mary might well survey her own tidy handiwork with satisfaction ; yet her whole object was not attained ; the whole appearance of the table was too tasteful and symmetrical for Miss Storey not to suspect that some other hands had been about it than Marianne's ; and so the little vase of the superfluous drawing-room flowers was moved off into a dark corner.

Then she just crossed to the drawing-room to make sure that Marianne had lighted the fire. She had not only remembered to do so, but had done her work so well, that it was roaring and blazing famously ; even the shutters were shut, but the curtains undrawn, and as Mary advanced to rectify this one neglect, her satisfaction was marred by discovering Frank on the hearthrug, writing an

exercise at full length by the firelight, his ink not even on the ground, but on a worked footstool which Mary had uncovered for this one evening.

‘Frank, what are you about?’ asked the girl, fretfully.

‘Writing, Mistress Poll.’

‘On the carpet. You must not. Go to the study,’ imperatively.

‘Can’t,’ answered Frank, laconically, but becoming the more carelessly good-humoured as Mary’s annoyance increased.

‘You shall. Now get up.’

‘Wont,’ whistled Frank.

‘You shall. I’m in earnest.’

‘Nonsense.’

‘Frank, you know you must.’

‘Indeed, ma’am, I know no such thing.’

‘I shall tell papa.’

‘Pray do.’

‘Now, Frank, you must go;’ and Mary’s tone was so resolute, and she set her foot so firmly on the floor, that Frank yielded, took up his ink, brushed by her, and went upstairs to finish his work in the cold. Why? might be asked again. Because Mary was not so useful and blameless without some reward. Her father always backed her, and in point of fact she ruled ‘the boys’ and ‘children’ as effectually as many a mother could have done.

Was this power good for a girl not yet fifteen? One in a thousand, useful, sturdy, simple-minded, sterling-hearted, might have escaped the dangers of such premature trust and authority; but not the many, and amongst the many not Mary Arnold.

She raised her head with a little unconscious jerk of self-satisfaction as Frank departed. Had her mother remonstrated with him, he would have turned sullen and stayed as long as he chose, or stayed as long as he chose without even becoming sullen, but she had only ordered and been obeyed.

‘It is a good thing that I came in, not mamma,’ thought Mary, complacently, ‘Frank is so careless; the ink would have been sure to be over before he had done, and that shabby old rug made more un-presentable than ever. Oh dear! how faded and shabby the whole room is; how different from the Hall.’

Still she left the drawing-room happily, but in the hall met Marianne, bare-armed, dirty-capped, and torn gowned; carrying a coal-scuttle to the dining-room.

‘Not dressed yet?’ indignant and despairing.

‘I can’t do everything at once, miss,’ answered Marianne, rather pertly.

Mary’s head fell again, and she went to the schoolroom, and sitting down by the fire, laid her young head on a chair, and sighed too long too unhappy a sigh for one who brought up as she had been should have been still a child. Tears came into her eyes, and she said, half aloud, ‘Oh, why should things be so wretched?’

It struck the half-hour, and Mary started up again, and went into the dining-room. ‘Mamma, are you going up to dress?’

‘Not quite yet, Mary. Come and sit down and warm yourself. How cold your hands are, dear,’ caressing the hands on the back of the chair.

‘But the Hughes’s are asked for six, mamma.’

‘Yes ; but I need not be half-an-hour dressing, and Miss Storey is amusing us all with her wonderful tales. Come and sit down amongst us, and enjoy yourself.’

Mary did sit down, but scarcely enjoyed herself in the ten minutes which she suffered to elapse before she again proposed the dressing, to which Mrs. Arnold, though wearily, did agree. Years of use had made Mary’s young fingers quick and clever, and her mother’s kiss and even more innate grace of motion, smile, and air, fully compensated the little daughter for all her care.

‘There is a ring, mamma ! do run down ; do let them find you in the drawing-room.’

Mrs. Arnold complied, and went, and Mary was hanging up the discarded shabby merino and putting by stray articles of dress, when a cry arose—a cry in the hall. Mary rushed down, brushed by Marianne, picked up Robert, and ran with him into the schoolroom, shut the door, and had the satisfaction of hearing Mr. and Mrs. Hughes ushered into the drawing-room amid most decorous silence ; for her unexpected appearance and prompt elopement had for three whole minutes suspended the next sob.

Little did she guess that Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were being ushered into a dark room. Mrs. Arnold, who was trying to light a damp spill, was not at all disconcerted, laid down the spill, advanced, shook hands, made a very simple apology, ending by looking round for Marianne, but finding she had escaped, turned to Mr. Hughes again and said, with her peculiarly graceful graciousness of manner, ‘I

am sure you will be kind enough to light the candles,' put the refractory spill into the hand of the former wrangler, then turning back to his wife, begged her to sit on the sofa, was afraid they must have found the drive very cold, and did feel it was so very kind of them to have come so far such a very cold evening.

Before the second candle was lighted, Mr. Arnold entered, blithe, courteous, and hearty, laughed good-humouredly at Mr. Hughes' futile attempts at the refractory candle, lighted it himself in a minute, and brought with him an air of kindliness and perfect freedom from *mauvaise honte*, that most rare and invaluable quality in a host. Very lively and animated the conversation soon became; Mrs. Hughes smiling her shy, soft smile at her host's description of their own arrival sixteen years ago at Aggesden Vicarage in the depth of winter, and then with more demonstrative Mr. Hughes, branching off to Sydney Smith's arrival at Foston le Clay, and from Sydney Smith to humourists in general.

When Mary, Miss Storey, and John came in after tea, the room was so warm and bright, the sound of Mr. Hughes's loud musical voice so cheery and pleasant, that the secret fear of a dull evening vanished from all. Mr. Hughes quite won Mrs. Arnold's heart for ever by his cordial greeting to her boy and instant originating of a subject in which he could join.

Then Mary was sent to play, and acquitted herself very creditably, and Mrs. Hughes, after a great deal of pressing and a great many shy appealing glances at her husband, who would not give her any aid,

not only suggesting no cold, but declaring she often sung to him without notes, was induced to try 'Auld Lang Syne,' in as sweet a voice as need be, but so nervously and tremulously that Mr. Hughes said, 'You little goose,' and laughed at her till her young face was covered with the prettiest blushes in the world.

'Do redeem your credit, Emmie, and let me play 'My mother bids me bind my hair,' you would not mind then.'

'I don't remember the words, John.'

'Then you ought, and must learn them the first thing to-morrow morning. Well then—'

But his host interrupted him, 'No, Mrs. Hughes shall not be teased any more; but you own to playing, Hughes, so must offer to take her place.'

'I? oh, just an accompaniment,' answered Mr. Hughes, looking caught out and shrugging up his broad shoulders deprecatingly.

'Oh, John!'

'There, you see, Mrs. Hughes knows better.'

'But—I can't play without notes.'

'We can supply them, no doubt.'

'No, all yours will be far too modern for me.'

'What, Corelli and Purcell? We can give you either.'

'No, nonsense, wont your little girl favour us again?'

'Little' Mary truly was, compared with the large-built figure retreating like a girl behind the sofa, as if so to escape his host's further pressings. But Mr. Arnold had thought Mr. Hughes had laughed at his pretty young wife far too much, and had no intention of letting him escape thus.

‘No, you shall play ; come out ! Now come and see,’ and he half led, half dragged, reluctant, genuinely bashful Mr. Hughes to the music stand, where, dusty but entire, stood a store of music of all dates.

‘Well, if I must, I must, but I think I can remember something, after all, without attacking that formidable pile.’

And, sitting down, he played ‘Adelaida’ as only a man can play—as, happily, year after year, more and more men do play. Why was honest Mr. Hughes—why are they all—more difficult and tiresome to induce to sit down to a piano than a young lady of eighteen ? But once having begun, Mr. Hughes was too happy and at ease to leave off, and concluded only after for nearly an hour playing any piece set before him ; his little wife’s eyes bright and glistening with pleasure at the appreciation and admiration of her husband’s talent written on every face.

A little more general conversation, wine, sandwiches, and biscuits, and the carriage came round, Mr. Arnold put on Mrs. Hughes’ shawl, handed her into her carriage, wished her good-night, Mr. Hughes wrung his host’s hand, and the two formidable guests were off. However, Mrs. Arnold, instead of leaning back, smothering a yawn, and remarking, ‘What a comfort it is over,’ said, erect and bright,

‘What pleasant people they are, Frank !’ and only then added, with a satisfaction that most hostesses would have shared, ‘Well, I am very glad they are done with, nevertheless.’

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUSINS.

Their whole demeanour was easy and natural, with that lofty grace and noble frankness which bespeak freeborn souls that have never been checked in their growth by feelings of inferiority.—*Sketch-book.*

THE Merivales' arrival had been postponed for another week, and thus they could not, if they would, have met the Hughes's at the Vicarage; but the next Sunday saw them all in the Hall pew. Many eyes wandered off their books that morning, for in a village so quiet, retired and devoid of gentry as Aggesden, the arrival of the family at the Hall was an event of pleasurable moment. Indeed, where is there not?—at least where the tenantry are true English men and women, where the squire is but passably affable, or, most of all, where there is a large family, who have been growing more and more of men and women every day since they had last been seen, leaving old charms of rosy cheeks and fat plump hands behind them, and developing in their place others of maturer age.

And a fine family the Merivales were; the present squire all that his tenantry desired, frank, manly, a good shot, and a kind-hearted landlord, with a free word for the husband, a gallant touch of his hat for the wife, and a penny or pat on the head for their little daughter. So not without reason was all Ag-

gesden interested in the annual universal arrival of the Hall family for the three winter months.

There towered Sir Hector, gay and careless as of old, twisting his thick yellow-brown moustache, and many an old dame, who had watched with almost a mother's fondness his growth from babyhood to his present verge of middle manhood, whispered with full eyes a hearty 'God bless him,' as she feasted her eyes on his handsome face and figure. Next to him, as tall for a woman as was her father for a man, stood Mrs. Arnold's 'Miss Merivale,' the Vicar's 'Netta,' fair-haired, sleepy blue-eyed, delicately complexioned was her face, but her carriage full of that defiant, courteous fearlessness which gives such piquancy to one portion of our English aristocracy ; graceful and stately alike. Next came the mother, Lady Agnes, a dwarf among such giants, but erect, quick-eyed, firm-mouthed, and, happily for her own peace, a match in spirit to any Merivale of them all. There were the boys Hector and Harry, threatening to rival their father in height and good looks before so very long, and beyond, Sophy, their elder sister, a plump, good-humoured, firmly-built maiden of sixteen, in whom Netta need never fear a rival in good looks. A tall, thin, refined-looking girl of twelve, two rosy, bright-eyed boys, and a pair of pale, rather sickly-looking girls of five and six, their eyes looking disproportionately brown and large under their straw hats, a governess in mourning, and a little, fair, simple Swiss *bonne* and governess combined, completed the large pew-full.

Coming out of church, the Vicarage and Hall party stopped to exchange greetings, Lady Agnes,

in a brisk, but rather discontented, voice, inquiring of the Vicar's wife after old parish friends. Bridget soon turned to listen to the daughter's bright, merry, animated talk to Johnnie, and a very pretty picture Antoinette Merivale made as she stood there, her rich silk dress held high enough to discover the slender, thick-booted feet and scarlet petticoat (then quite a new fashion), the long, flowing, grey cloak making her quite a picturesque figure. Bridget looked to see whether the little country boy were not abashed by so fashionable an accoster, but no, not a bit! and John Arnold looked at least quite as much a gentleman's son as Miss Merivale a gentleman's daughter, and little more could be said.

Mrs. Arnold, on the contrary, was stiff and formal for her, neither the Vicaress nor the lady seemed quite at their ease, and Lady Agnes was already making the move to the carriage when Sir Hector (who had been speaking to old Master Blogg, a groom of former days) came up.

'Nonsense! not going yet, Agnes; I have not seen one of them. How do you do, Anna?' to Mrs. Arnold. 'How are you, Mary, and all of you? Ah, my little beauty, come, Mabel, you'll give me a kiss now?'

'Zoo kept zous promise?' asked wary Amabel, who had no intention of bestowing unmerited favour.

'Yes, on my honour,' holding out his hands to take her up.

'To-morrow—not in churchyard,' said Mabel, retreating backwards.

'You little treacherous—'

‘Come Hector, we must be going, we shall meet soon, I daresay, Mrs. Arnold,’ and Lady Agnes looked round for her husband’s arm.

‘Oh, I shall walk ; you can go if you like. Can’t you walk down the church-path without an arm ? Well, then, I’ll tell you what, Cousin Anna, I’ll just hand my wife into the carriage, and see Arnold by coming in to luncheon, if I may.’

‘Eh, what ?’ said Mr. Arnold, coming up and shaking warmly Lady Agnes’ passive hand, ‘come in to luncheon, Sir Hector, any other day in the week you like, but not to-day ; we keep no Sunday company.’

‘Come, Hector, we must be going ; your mother will be waiting luncheon.’

‘Well, then, we must be off ; good-bye—*au revoir*. Come, Netta ; where are the children ?’

‘Walking home with Miss Campbell, I suppose,’ answered his wife ; and with a general goodbye they started on the long path leading to the Hall road, while the Vicarage party hastened home.

Mr. Arnold, however, was but just shutting out the wintry wind, when Sir Hector appeared at the door.

‘What do you want ?’ asked the former tutor.

‘Want ? a luncheon to be sure with old friends ; you can’t refuse me ?’

‘I can indeed. No, go home and—’

‘Be hanged ?’

‘Nonsense ! Merivale,’ with evident displeasure.

‘Oh, the tutor coming out, but I am not so

tractable as I used to be. I really am come, and mean to have luncheon too.'

'You certainly are come, but I am sorry that you oblige me to shut the door in my patron's face;' and Mr. Arnold was as good as his word.

Bridget was much surprised. Why Sir Hector might not, if he chose, lunch at the Vicarage on a Sunday she could not see. Nor would the squire himself; he looked hot and angry a minute through the glass-door, and then turned on his heel and departed.

Mr. Arnold knew better, and laughed. 'Now be quick, children, we're very late,' he said to those loitering in the hall, and turned into his study.

The whole party entered the dining-room together, and Mr. Arnold had said grace before they discovered simultaneously what sent all alike into fits of laughter. Outside the window, on a rickety garden-chair, sat Sir Hector, hat in hand, most lamentable-visaged, looking longingly on the cold beef and smoking potatoes within.

Mr. Arnold leant back in his chair and laughed like a boy, till the maid entering, he remembered the proprieties of life, and sat up erect, shaking his head unrelentingly at the noble beggar, who sat on, notwithstanding the neglect with which he met, every now and then pulling his forelock, but otherwise immovable, and keeping his longing eyes fast on the viands, now beginning to be dispensed within.

Mr. Arnold helped round—no short process, quick-handed as he was, before glancing again out

of the window, and then, seeing Sir Hector still there, rose and went out to him, dragging his former pupil up by main force, and walking him down to the road.

‘Now, Hector, how can you be so absurd?—Go home to your wife and mother.’

‘Why should I?’

‘Because you ought.’

‘Ought? I am sure my *wife* at least ought to be very glad to be rid of me, for she does nothing but grumble at me when she has me.’

‘Because you are so trying.’

‘Well, we took each other for better and worse; and I’m sure I’ve had the worse of—’

‘Come Hector, have done!—Just tell me how poor Robert is, and then be off.’

‘Robert?—Just the same, poor fellow!’ and Sir Hector sighed; ‘send your boy up to him after dinner, will you? I’m sure he’ll do more good at the Hall than at church.’

‘Yes, I agree with you there; he will be sure to come, and let Robert keep him till he’s tired of him; we shan’t be frightened even if he does not come in till bedtime.’

‘I may give *him* a meal, then? let us be clear on that point; if I may not I had better send him home to tea.’

‘Oh, Merivale, never serious!’

‘Often enough, Sir, when I’m away from my Mentor. Why you wont give me a meal, I can’t diskiver; I’d have washed my own plate and spoon, if that’s all.’

‘There, go away,’ said the Vicar, smiling in spite

of himself, 'or you'll come in for no luncheon at all.'

'Your fault, not mine, and 'twill be your fault too if I am late for service, taking a poor fellow in, or rather, turning him out, like this.'

Mr. Arnold hesitated a minute, and then said frankly, 'Merivale, you must feel why it is; and if you wish us to be free and happy together, why cause needless vexation?'

'Pooh!' said Sir Hector, a little contemptuously; 'if Agnes will have such whims, it shall be at her own cost, not mine. I shan't give in to her foolish prejudices, I can tell you.'

'But you will accommodate yourself to her wishes, I am sure. Good-bye, my eight will be wanting their second helps as much as your wife her husband. Good-bye, and God bless you Merivale.'

The Squire wrung his old tutor's hand heartily, and Mr. Arnold, his old pupil's not less so, and so they parted, as they always did at heart, the best of friends.

'Johnnie, I have brought back an invitation for you: Sir Hector hopes you will go up and see poor Robert, and I answered for you that you would, and stay all the evening if he liked it.'

Johnnie assented rather gravely for him, but started as soon as the meal was over, and walked the mile and a-half cheerily enough when once off.

He rang the hall-bell, and was consigned by the footman to Mr. Harris, the butler, and by him solemnly ushered as 'Mr. John Arnold' into the library, a long, low, dark room, with a pleasant recessed bay at one end, in which in the pale wintry

sunlight lay a boy of seventeen, a Merivale in length of limb, but in little else, so pale, sickly, and worn was his whole bearing. Sophy was on a stool near him, reading.

‘So you’ve come at last!’ said Robert, half fretfully, half reproachfully, as he held out his thin, chilly fingers to meet his cousin’s glowing young hand.

‘Have you been waiting for me?—We were rather late at dinner, but I walked so quickly I’d hoped I had made up.’

‘Yes, you must have been quick,’ said Sophy, in a brisk, blithe voice, which it did one’s heart good to hear. ‘Papa has not been in ten minutes, and he said you had only just sat down to dinner when he left. And now I must be off in five minutes to dress for church; but do just tell me all about Miss Storey, and how you like her. Mademoiselle has fallen in love at first sight, and is longing to know all about her.’

‘Is she so pretty, then?’ asked Robert, roused to interest.

‘No,—at least, perhaps a little; she has rather pretty eyes and figure, but the rest rather so-so. Am I right, Johnnie?’

‘Yes, I dare say. But she’s straightforward, and has no airs, Robert, and that’s what we like.’ And in such conversation they went on even after Sophy had left them; and, indeed, of what could they talk? for the poor crippled heir could not bear to hear of the boyish sports and pastimes into which he could never hope to enter.

Then Robert detailed how Lady Agnes had quar-

relled with the coachman, and he was going; and how vexed was Sir Hector, who hated to see new faces about; and in such family gossip the time passed till the church bells ceased. Then there was a little pause, and Johnnie said straightforwardly, 'Shall I read you the lessons, Robert?'

'Oh, yes, if you like,' in an uninterested, ungracious voice.

Johnnie read; there was a few minutes' silence when the boy finished, first broken by his asking Robert rather abruptly, 'How he had liked Brighton?'

'Oh, I did not go; I am rather too old to be wheeled up and down the Parade for the amusement of a polite crowd now. Papa took me down to his little farm in Essex, and the time passed somehow; and the lad sighed heavily.

'Was it a pretty part,—anything near you cared to see?'

'An old Roman encampment to be seen by the eyes of the faithful alone, a moat covered with duckweed in which papa's great-uncle had been drowned, and a frightful old woman to keep the house and cook our meals.'

'Then you would have been better at Brighton,' said Johnnie, uncompromisingly.

'Oh, no! Papa was very good to me, he always is; he drove me about everywhere, read to me, and even made me take lessons in sketching; had a man down from town at two guineas a day. See what it is to be eldest son and heir!' with momentary brightness; 'without a leg to stand upon,' he ended bitterly.

‘What have you been sketching? Sophy was teaching you perspective last winter, I remember. Did you succeed? Where are they?’

‘Oh, upstairs!’ answered the lad, wearily.

‘I can find them, I daresay, in your bookcase? All right, I’ll be down in a minute.’

‘No, don’t go—ring for Alston, will you—twice. He will know where he has put them; he used to hold the water for me, poor fellow, so he knows them well enough, and I really believe learnt more from Mr. Eastworth than myself. Papa came upon him sketching the old farm, four miles off, with my colours, one day, but the boldness of the attempt in every sense was so admirable that we never taxed him with it. My clouds used especially to try him; I don’t know how often he has touched his cap and said, in his most deferential of voices, ‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Merivale, but I do think you are laying hon that laylock too heavy.’’

Here Alston himself appeared, demure and respectful as a body-servant could be, and a very faithful servant he was, in all essentials, to his young master.

‘Yes, we have quite high arts below stairs here,’ Robert continued, as Alston closed the door behind him; ‘Mr. Harris plays the flute, and the school-room maid has made the most of her opportunities and picked up enough French to excuse Miss Campbell’s driving the poor girls into speaking German. Oh dear, these modern accomplishments!’

‘But they don’t hurt you.’

‘Yes, they do,’ retorted Robert, with some fretfulness; ‘if I get Sophy for one half-hour between

breakfast and seven it is all she or I can do, and here am I, a great useless log, keeping papa in when he wants to be out and about, or Netta away from the company she delights in. She's grown a pretty woman, eh ?

‘ Very ; and so good-natured.’

‘ Yes, she is that. She reads a dry book to me every day, the last thing before luncheon ; but, poor thing, how she yawns all the time.’

‘ Perhaps she wants something to eat,’ suggested Johnnie ; ‘ you should provide her with an ante-luncheon before she begins.’

Robert laughed. ‘ Ah ! I never thought of that ; but the half-hour Sophy gives me afterwards is rather different. We are in full track after the Egyptians now, and I tell Miss Campbell she ought to consider it lesson time, and cut it off in the evening. Ah ! here come my daubs.’

The sketches proved to be little more, but with a vein of originality throughout them which made each striking as a general effect, although too careless and incorrect to present a faithful picture of the subject taken. But the very sight of them roused Robert to sit up, and in detailing Mr. Eastworth's politely severe criticisms upon one, the adventures of the day on which another had been taken, the calm loveliness of the scenery of a third, which, transcribed by Robert, looked uncommonly stormy and muddy, gave rise to a flow of lively talk which lasted till the home-party returned from the afternoon service.

Nearly all turned into the library and sat talking all at once, till Robert, being in full conversation

with Netta and Sophy, Sir Hector slipped out, beckoning to Johnnie to follow.

‘What do you think of my boy?’ he asked.

‘I, uncle? He does not seem any worse, I think; he has not complained of any pain all the afternoon.’

‘That’s thanks to you. He was full of aches and pains, poor fellow, in the morning, but I knew *you* would set him to rights. Thank you, my boy, for keeping cooped up by my poor son all this afternoon.’

‘Oh, uncle! who wouldn’t?’ said Johnnie, with a heartiness of pity he was, in more guarded moments, already learning to moderate before Sir Hector, so sore a subject was his son’s helpless state with the father.

‘You don’t think you could bear it, then, any better?’

‘Oh, no!’ cried the tall, brisk, active boy in horror at the bare idea, as if such a possibility had never before suggested itself, and now startled and chilled him.

‘Little chance of an Arnold coming to such a state, my lad; it’s only amongst us upper classes that mothers leave their poor babes to servants. Oh, that woman! I never will forgive her!’

Johnnie answered nothing, and it was well he was silent. Any word, whether of assent or remonstrance, would have sufficed to rouse into a flame Sir Hector’s ever-smouldering resentment against the nurse, who had concealed till the last moment a fall which had made his son a cripple for life—a constant and hopeless sufferer. In vain had his brother and Mr. Arnold represented that all the physicians agreed that Robert’s constitution

was naturally weak, that many of the Merivales were sickly, that any other blow or fall might have brought into activity the disease latent in him and too many of his race; that even a school-fight, a blow at cricket, or any other such accident, to which he would in boyhood have been hourly exposed, would have sufficed to bring the latent evil out; Sir Hector only vowed the fiercer that he never could, never would, forgive her who had entailed such ceaseless trouble, mortification, and pain on any child of his. And in this 'her' he sometimes included his wife.

'My poor boy!' he said, now brushing his hand across his eyes; 'there, I wont keep you from him. I'm afraid he's sometimes fretful, even with you, but you'll bear with him, I know.'

And Sir Hector turned off as if to his study, then changing his mind, mounted the stairs four at a time, and going to the nursery spent the next hour in a game of romps with Arthur, Willie, Anna, and Emma, his four youngest children, as full of spirits as any one of them; and well might their shout of delight at papa's appearance cheer his kind heart at once.



CHAPTER VIII.

ANTOINETTE.

If it be possible, O my Father, God,
 Remove, remove this heavy shade of woe
 That whelms in black eclipse my sun of health
 In zenith power ; but if that dreadful shade
 Depart not, till the orb th' horizon touch—
 This darkened life go down in outer night
 Without another ray of joyous health—
 Thy will be done !

JOHN COLLETT.

IT was just ten days later that Sir Hector said to his wife, as they were leaving the breakfast table, 'My dear, I wish you would ask the Arnolds here for Thursday.'

'Thursday ! what is Thursday ?'

'Sophy's birthday ; and she would like to have them, I know.'

'But I can't have her lessons interfered with.'

'My dear, surely her late campaign of masters might win her a holiday now and then. Have the children to dinner at our luncheon, and Arnold and his wife to our late dinner.'

'Oh ! if you want Mr. and Mrs. Arnold, we can slip them into the party next week ; I dare say, some one will be sure to have colds and decline.'

'Thank you ; but I don't choose such superior people to be made a convenience of ; have them to the next large party and welcome, but meanwhile I want to enjoy them, and we'll have the whole school-room party up in the evening, and enjoy ourselves together.'

‘Enjoy ourselves with those loud, uncouth children?’

‘No more uncouth than our own,’ answered Sir Hector, sharply; ‘and I can tell you, you have not a son that can bear comparison with Johnnie, nor a daughter with little Mabel, a moment.’

‘Opinions vary,’ answered Lady Agnes, calmly.

‘Ours certainly seem fated to do so,’ returned Sir Hector, with the first sullen cloud we have seen on his brow.

‘You can have the *children*, if you like,’ said his wife a little conciliatorily, after a minute’s mutual silence.

‘You are very good,’ he answered with a sneer; then recovering himself, laughed, and said apologetically and kindly, ‘Come, Agnes, let the Vicarage feud cease both on your side and mine. We are here but three months in the year, and if my little cousins were as uncouth as bears, how could they contaminate children fenced in with governesses and decorum like ours?’

‘No—but it is an undesirable connexion.’

‘Come, Agnes, if Frank were a great hulking fellow of twenty, I could forgive your keeping at a distance with such a daughter as Netta, but as it is, I really can’t see what the Arnolds can do us but good; to me there is such a charm in that bright, helpful spirit, which pervades a large struggling family like theirs, especially when the head of it is such a clever, honest-hearted man as Arnold, who never seems to see how hard fortune has been to him and his, for what much better things he was made.’

‘Yes, I have no objection to the Vicar.’

‘Ah, Agnes, why will you women be so mean, jealous, and spiteful? With Anna Arnold, you can find no failing in gentility; I know no woman to compare with her in grace and breeding, except, perhaps, the Marchioness of Cardale, and my poor father, with all his fastidiousness, thought the same.’

‘Why doesn’t she keep her children tidier and cleaner? there was Anna such a dirty little object at the pond when we drove up the other day.’

‘Why doesn’t she? because she has three maids in the place of our score, and was brought up to better things.’

‘A great mistake.’

‘I beg your pardon, I cannot think any system which produced Anna Arnold a mistake.’

‘And those shabby dirty rooms, a pane broken in the window, one of the children’s old dolls on the floor.’

‘Give Mrs. Arnold your maids, rooms, means, and governesses, and I’ve little doubt that her household would rival your own. No, they are poor, I don’t deny it, but it is to our shame. Why did I leave my old tutor, my kindest, best of friends in a living of 400*l.* a year, and give Elton Merivale to that idle dog of a brother of mine? and did the injustice sour him one moment? never! Agnes. I would give something to carry that man’s conscience about with me.’

‘Hector, you are perfectly infatuated. Why was Harry brought up to the Church, if not that Elton Merivale has from time immemorial been the provision for the younger son?’

‘Oh yes, yes, but I’ll tell you what, I’ll put no son of ours into orders for any such reason.’

‘Well, pray don’t if you don’t like it, but I think you will change your mind when your five are young men about you. You’ll find the Army and Navy rather expensive for so many.’

Whereupon Sir Hector whistled and walked out of the room; not that he gave up his point, but as a gentleman he objected to such disputes between husband and wife.

Therefore, not having abandoned his object, nor meaning to let Lady Agnes think he had done so, he said after dessert, when the servants were gone,

‘Well, Agnes, have you written to Anna yet?’

‘Anna? oh, Mrs. Arnold, no; we will talk it over first,’ a little mysteriously.

Of course Hector and Harry were all attention at the idea of a secret, whilst Antoinette said at once, ‘Oh, are you going to ask them, mamma? I was wondering only to-day, how it was we had seen so little of them.’

‘Then *you* don’t think them an infliction?’

‘I, papa? no, I like them all very much, the boys especially. Yes, mamma, give Sophy and Agnes a holiday, and have them to the early dinner, and Miss Storey to keep Mademoiselle company in the afternoon; she is bent on making a friend of the Vicarage governess, Sophy tells me.’

‘Miss Storey?’ my dear, ‘I don’t even know who she is.’

‘A woman, my dear, like my own wife and daughter,’ answered Sir Hector, who feeling perfectly good-humoured and happy himself, could not

forbear being aggravating; 'Anna's Miss Campbell—a perfect encyclopædia of accomplishments, no doubt.'

'And have Frank and Johnnie too, papa,' put in the boys.

'Oh yes, we're going to have all, at least all who can manage their own knives and forks. Just write the note when you go to the drawing-room, Agnes, and Jervis can take it when he goes to the post in the morning. And tell Arnold we shall dine at six on Thursday, to insure a good evening, knowing how early he will go away when the children are here.'

'Very well,' answered poor Lady Agnes, savage at heart, but already meditating a little revenge—a revenge Sir Hector might justly have termed mean and spiteful, being no other than saying to her daughter as they reached the drawing-room, 'Netta dear, will you write the note? I am so sleepy, I am sure I should forget one half of the tribe we are to ask.'

Consequently, on the Vicarage breakfast table the next morning lay the following note.

'DEAR MRS. ARNOLD,

'Papa and mamma hope very much that you and Mr. Arnold will dine with us on Thursday at six, so that we may have a nice long evening, even should you wish to leave rather early on account of my cousins, whom we hope you will allow to join the early dinner, and spend the afternoon with us. Mademoiselle is longing to make Miss Storey's acquaintance, and I am sure she will like the dear little thing, and not feel her a stranger a minute.

If this cold weather last, the boys will have some good skating, I hope. Mamma is sure you will excuse my writing in her stead ; we have been a long drive, and the cold has made her *sleepy* ! Best love to yourself, Mary, and all, and believe me,

‘ Ever yours affectionately,

‘ MARIE ANTOINETTE MERIVALE.’

Certainly Miss Merivale did her best to atone for Lady Agnes’ intentional slight ; the young lady’s note was so affectionate and free that Mrs. Arnold really forgot it was the mother who ought to have written, which oblivion Lady Agnes was far from desiring. If Mrs. Arnold had been struck by it, she knew well enough she would have endeavoured to find some excuse for staying at home, at least herself, and thus after all, Sir Hector would not have been so overbearing without suffering for it in some degree himself.

Oh the littleness of women !

As it was, no one hesitated about the invitation. Mrs. Arnold thought they must dine with the Merivales some time or other, and so, the sooner done, the sooner it would be over. Her husband always liked going to the Hall, meeting congenial minds, and seeing his old pupil in his happiest light, that in which he always appeared to the greatest advantage, a host. He himself always got on well with Lady Agnes, and so at first had his wife, and if they now took to chilling formalities, why should he take part in grievances which he could not understand and had found long ago neither of the ladies at heart wished redressed ? Truth to say

he loved Sir Hector as his own son, and never would, and never could abate one atom of his friendship for him.

So, at one on Thursday, Miss Storey, in her best dress, cloak, and bonnet, not a little shy and pleased, escorted the four elder Arnolds to the Hall, where they were shown into the schoolroom, and by Sophy taken upstairs to get rid of their outdoor dress, Mademoiselle, with a pretty mixture of grace and shyness, performing the same office for Bridget. Then came luncheon, rather a constrained meal, for Lady Agnes was not a woman to set children at ease, and Sir Hector was out of spirits himself, Robert being unusually depressed and out of sorts.

After dinner, however, things brightened. Sophy took her friends back to the schoolroom, as bright and cheerful again as the eastern dining-room, the southern sun streaming on its oaken-panelled walls, and threatening to extinguish the fire, bitterly frosty as the day really was. Sophy proposed they should sit round the fire and play at proverbs and other verbal games till the carriage came round which at half-past two was to take Mary, Anna, Miss Campbell, and her second pupil, Agnes, to Worcester to see a travelling panorama of the Mississippi, which happened then to be in the cathedral town; and the half-hour after the first stiff uneasy minutes passed merrily away.

Punctually at the half-hour the three girls drove off, all very happy, and two very proud of being so deferentially handed into so grand an equipage by the tall footmen; and thus the two junior governesses were left to amuse one another, not a very

difficult matter, for Mademoiselle was very voluble and sociable, and Bridget was quite young enough to make friends easily.

They had not been alone very long, however, before there was a slight knock, the door opened, and Miss Merivale entered. She bowed slightly to Bridget who, with fair, gentle-faced Mademoiselle, rose at her appearance, and then said, in a bright, easy tone, so pleasant an one that the little touch of condescension could hardly mar its kindliness—

‘Oh, Mademoiselle, don’t let me disturb you. I only came to beg that if Miss Storey would like to see the house or the picture-gallery, you will take her everywhere. And if you are not afraid of the cold, Mr. Sanderson will be delighted if you will walk round the winter-garden, he is so proud of his autumn crocuses and leafless jessamines. I’ve promised to go with Sophy myself to see his wonders, before going to the lake, so I must not stop. Good-bye ; and she ran off.

Meanwhile Mr. Arnold himself had walked up to the Hall to prepossess Sir Hector in favour of a young man to be brought up on the morrow for poaching, and after the business interview with his squire in the study, was easily persuaded to spend the rest of the afternoon with Sir Hector and the boys, who, with Antoinette and Sophy, were found in the library just starting for the lake.

‘Oh, just off, are you ? We’ll come with you, eh, Arnold ? not grown too old for skating, are you ?’

‘Rather, I’m afraid ; but I will come down and look on, if you’ll allow me a quiet corner to slide on occasionally to restore animation.’

‘Ah, yes, you and Robert can keep together then. Have you rung for Alston to wheel you down, my boy?’

‘I’m not going.’

‘Oh, do ; you said you would, and it’s quite warm in the sunshine ; you have not been out since Tuesday.’

‘Going out is no good to me.’

‘A little, isn’t it ? You needn’t stay a minute longer than you like ; I’ll walk on with you to old Brooks afterwards, he was inquiring after you the other day.’

‘Old Brooks ! I don’t see why I should be dragged out to please a dirty old man.’

‘No, not if you would rather stay in,’ said Sir Hector, sadly. ‘Well, then,’ more brightly, ‘I’ll stay in with you, and we’ll fight our conqueror game at chess ; we shall hardly do so to-night.’

‘No, thank you, I don’t want any one.’

‘But I would rather be with you ; I will join the skaters later.’

‘I don’t see why I’m always to be watched, as if I could not be trusted out of your sight a minute.’

‘Very well then, my boy, I’ll go ;’ and so the party took the poor invalid at his word and left him.

‘Poor fellow !’ said the father, as he and the Vicar walked down to the lake together, his daughters and the boys far away in front. Robert’s fretful ungraciousness never excited more than pity even in Sir Hector, free as he was from all such failings himself.

‘Has his general health been worse lately?’ asked the Vicar, who each time, and these were many, that he had been up to the Hall since the Merivales’ return, had been struck more and more by Robert’s increased unjust petulance, especially towards his two kindest friends, Sir Hector and Sophy.

‘No; at least so Brodie says. No, poor fellow, it is that he is only now learning the full bitterness of his lot, now that he is at an age when most boys would be entering on the pleasures and dignity of manhood. Don’t smile, Arnold, there is a dignity even about a boy of seventeen, that is, if he has within him the stuff to form a true man hereafter. Yes, there are just thirteen years of ceaseless vexation, mortification, and loss of all that makes life precious and pleasant, before my poor boy! I do hope that perhaps by thirty he may have grown used to his lot, and find there are some duties left. Infirm as he is, he may look after the property and tenantry as his father has never done before him.’

Mr. Arnold pressed his old pupil’s arm tight, but did not answer, although rejoicing to see that in his serious moments Sir Hector was at last learning to make duty and pleasure synonymous.

Mr. Arnold did not stay long by the skaters, just long enough to admire and be amused by Netta’s so gracefully treating the ice as a well-known element, to watch his own two boys’ evolutions proudly, and take two or three solitary slides himself; then, after taking three or four brisk turns on the sunny gravel walk, retraced his steps to the house.

Once here he knocked at the library door, and,

entering, found Robert at his old place, lying in the bay window.

‘Ah—I thought Alston might be reading to you.’

‘No,’ answered Robert, sullenly.

‘You are not inclined for reading, then?’

‘No—I’m tired of the sight of books,’ vehemently.

Mr. Arnold saw that everything that might be proposed would still be distasteful, and so, as he generally did, seizing the present opportunity, he sat down beside the boy’s sofa, and said, ‘Then I shall not be disturbing you if I ask you to let me say a few words to you?’

Blunt to the point as ever, Mr. Arnold could never approach a subject gradually, even to a fretful invalid. But, though Robert’s pale cheek flushed crimson in a moment, perhaps like his father, he would rather have a good scolding spoken out at once than a rebuke coming on in such gentle approaches that he would have been aggravated beyond endurance before the matter was fairly afloat.

‘Forgive me, I am too abrupt,’ said the Vicar, kindly, instantly distressed at having given pain to one so helpless.

‘Never mind—go on. But I know it all, sir, already.’

‘Do you?—scarcely, I think. How your melancholy—no, truth does no harm—your determination not to be pleased, grieves and depresses your father! I never see him so sad as when you have been bent, as this afternoon, on taking part in nothing.’

‘If I must lie down all my life, mayn’t I even lie still?’ asked Robert, despairingly.

‘No,’ answered the Vicar, brightly; ‘life has still its object even for one so tried as yourself.’

‘I can’t see one, except——’ the lad’s eyes filled.

‘Can’t you, my dear boy? One is so simple—to take the kindnesses of those around as kindnesses, not insults.’

‘No other boy of my age needs such kindnesses.’

‘Not many, I own. But think of the temptations to which as such a son and heir as either of your brothers might have been, you would now be beginning to be exposed; the headstrongness, the folly, the temptation to dissimulation to conceal folly’s consequences, all the flush and excitement of first manhood.’

‘Oh if I could be a man but one hour,’ cried the boy, passionately.

‘Robert, it is a noble thing to be a man, I don’t deny it; to be a strong, fearless, brave-hearted man. But it is still left for every one of us to be something better, grander still—I heartily mean it, a good, earnest, pious Christian; to be able to feel

O Lord, my God, do Thou Thy holy will,
I will lie still.’

‘A woman may feel that, but a man—a boy as I am—oh, sir, never!’

‘You will know better in time. Do you remember the saying—

My son’s my son till he gets him a wife,
But my daughter’s my daughter all my life.

And most parents feel the truth of it with their sons deeply. But you—why long after every other son and daughter has married or left them, will be

still with them. 'Yes, face the truth,' as Robert winced and turned unconsciously away, 'and think what a blessing, a comfort, a brightness in the house you in those dull, quiet days may be, something for them still to love and care and plan for; and as years pass on, for them to let not only love and care and plan for them, but lean and rest upon themselves. If you are a cheerful, sunny-hearted, middle-aged man yourself, think what a blessing you will be to your father and mother, who will then be going down the hill of life themselves. But if a fretful, peevish, hardly-pleased one, still a source (as you will have been for thirty years and more) of endless anxiety and disappointment.'

'Oh, Mr. Arnold, do you think I shall live thirty years longer?'

'As likely as any of your brothers; but think what a comfort you may have been in those thirty years to all around you.'

'Seven-and-forty!' repeated Robert with a sigh, half of oppression, half of newly awakened interest; 'growing an old man myself—'

'With hosts of nephews and nieces expecting Uncle Robert always to have a hand and purse ready to help them.'

'Horrid little bores!'

'No, you won't think so then, at least *I* don't, and I am just entering the age you pronounce to be so near old manhood.'

'Are you? Mr. Arnold, do you wish to go on living?'

'Very much,' said the Vicar, earnestly and reverently. 'I long to see my sons and daughters grown

into men and women, my work here bearing a little fruit—yes, and yourself content with your lot, and, if it pleases God, the comfort and light of this old Hall, when else it might have been childless—before it pleases Him that I should die.’

Robert did not answer. Strange and perplexing thoughts and contradictory wishes were working with him. At last he broke out,

‘If I could only see any hope of a change!’

‘My lad, I think the contrary is a blessing. If Sir Benjamin held out any hopes that in one or two, or even five or ten years, your state would be different, then the consequent *uncertain* endurance might well keep you in constant worry and longing impatience; it might not seem worth while to conquer the low spirits and petulance assailing you but for a season. But now that you know that exactly the state in which you are now is that to which it has pleased God to call you for life, then it is indeed a matter of vital importance to conquer its temptations, to cherish its duties, and to do your best therewith to be content.’

There were four or five minutes’ silence, and then Mr. Arnold rose to return home to finish his sermon and fetch his wife, adding only, as he shook hands,

‘My boy, forgive me if I have been too hard or harsh. No one can know your trials but yourself, and He who alone can help you to face them only knows if, middle-aged man as I am myself, I could bear your lot as well as you do yourself. But this you know that you have promised to be His faithful soldier and servant to your life’s end; and faithful,

submissive as a soldier should be even to an earthly master you cannot call yourself now.'

Robert looked up with a wild, troubled look, his mouth quivering, as if indeed his lot were harder than he could bear, but only answered, 'Thank you;' and then, with a little smile, 'I am sorry I can't let you out myself; will you ring, please, and tell Harris to send Alston in half an hour?'

And so they parted; but Mr. Arnold saw no cause for despairing. He had not despaired of Sir Hector for pretty nearly thirty years, why should he any sooner despair of his son?



CHAPTER IX.

THE PORTRAIT GALLERY.

She took the cup of life to sip—
 Too bitter 'twas to drain;
 She raised it meekly to her lip,
 Then put it back again.

MEANWHILE, as Miss Merivale left the school-room, Mademoiselle watched her till the door was closed, and then, turning to her guest, said eagerly, 'Is she not lovely?'

'Very,' answered Bridget, whose eyes had never yet feasted on beauty of so refined and high-bred an order.

'Charmante, charmante! Ah, I heard so much of you English women before I came, but not one word too much; no beauty like yours, so high, so fair, so grand. But you will like to take advantage and see the house?'

'So very much!'

'Ah, and 'tis so like Miss Merivale to think of it; she is so good to me and all; she comes in here and talks, sits there, puts her feet on the fender, draws up her skirt, shows her pretty little slender feet and silk stockings, and then tells me about all her balls and drawing-rooms. Some are afraid of her, but I, I just say what I think, and she always takes it well. Ah, the funny, frank demoiselle!'

‘What?’ asked Bridget, seeing Mademoiselle much amused at the recollection of some past event.

‘Ah, she was telling me all about her first ball and all that, and I said, ‘Now, Miss Merivale, come tell me, were you not the belle of them all?’ and she just opened her blue eyes and answered, ‘Assurément, Mademoiselle, et c’est ce que je serai toujours.’ Oh, how she made me laugh!’

‘Then she knows she is beautiful?’ asked Bridget, a little disappointed.

‘Oh, yes, how can she help it? but she just takes it as a matter of course—she is admired and she likes it. Ah, but let one come a little too near, *ma foi!* her ladyship is all cold and hoity-toity in a moment. Ah, I wouldn’t be that poor person! But, now, will we go?’ and Mademoiselle rose and began the survey of the house by taking Bridget to the state dining and drawing-rooms. So much carved oak, and so many feet of Turkey carpet in the one, so many costly hangings and glittering mirrors in the other, might well astonish the little governess, and awaken her mind to some perception of the vastness of the social gulf stretching between the daughter of a London clerk and the daughter of its owners. But all was too far above any need or desire of hers to excite envy or more than awed admiration. No; a house at the top of Highgate Hill, instead of its clayey foot, with a bright garden before and behind, and plenty of fresh air around, was still the climax of Bridget Storey’s desires.

‘The every-day sitting-rooms—ah, yes, my lady is out, but we will only just look in, she does not like any one peeping, only Miss Antoinette does

what she likes,—see, this is where we shall perhaps be to-night—harp, piano—full of water-colours, my lady's and Miss Netta's drawings—pretty, but we had better come. And the dining-room, ah, that we have seen—well, then, upstairs, the state bedrooms ;' and Mademoiselle led the way.

'This is the room where your King Charles the First slept. Ah, I do think so many English rooms say he slept in them, the poor man can never once have slept at home. See, here is his potrait, and here his children ; is not your 'merry monarch' a grave, nice-looking little boy there? And see the hangings, how tattered ! I think it is the velvet's own weight drags it off the silk. Ah, and here is another curiosity, a fan your Queen Elizabeth left behind her when she had nearly ruined Sir Robert Merivale, so Sir Hector says, with lodging with him, with all her people, just two days.'

So Mademoiselle went on, Bridget taking in as much as she could, till they reached the picture-gallery.

'Ah, you should have her old ladyship here, she knows it all. Voyons—yes, that is the very Sir Robert, look at his pointed beard and ruff ; and there his wife, poor lady ! with long pointed waist, just like an extinguisher topsy-turvy, you call it ? Ah, but this is my favourite, Sir Hector. Yes, James the First had made him a baronet—cost him 1000*l*. I think I heard my Sir Hector say. Look at his buff coat and love-lock, and his nice, good-looking face. Well, he fell at Worcester, and his lady and two little sons had to run to Flanders, and there I do fear they became very bad men, for it

was then—no, when they came back and got the estate back and went to court—that Sir Hector always says it would have been all up with the Merivales if they hadn't both died of small-pox the second year of the restoration, and left but one child between them, Sir Robert, his great-great-grandfather, who, when he came of age, being still but poor, married the only daughter of a great pinmaker, and became monstrous rich. Oh, how Sir Hector teases my lady about that match, and will call every pinmaker his cousin, and says they ought to put on their papers 'Pin-and-Merivale-makers.'

'But is there no likeness of him, this Sir Robert?'

• 'Ah, yes, there, with my lady the pinmaker, Sophia Bisset was her name, and my lady always says she was of as good family as the Merivales, but must have fallen during the Civil Wars, only had no one to pick her up again. Yes, there they are, nice, quiet looking, home folks—see, the date is 1710, so they were getting old, but I like them. They look so happy, she in her great Mechlin head, he in his flowing wig; and Sir Hector says they must have been very prudent, clever people, for they had sixteen children and matched them all far better than he can ever hope to do his ten.'

Bridget laughed.

'Ah, you would laugh if you could hear him. I did, last Christmas, when my Lady Agnes' sister, the Countess, and her son the young Earl were here. Ah, I do sometimes think'—and Mademoiselle's shrug of the shoulders and merry glance expressed all she left unsaid. 'But you will like to see Sir

Hector himself there, taken sitting by the sea-shore ; he dislikes it so much he offers a reward of ten pounds to whoever will burn or steal it. Why ! is that four ? we must hurry ; Lady Agnes, and Miss Annie will be in at the quarter, but you must see Miss Merivale herself,' and she led Bridget on past many pictures, over which she would have liked to linger, to show her that of a girl in every-day out-of-door attire. 'Yes, look on—look at her dear little hands in the warm great gloves, her proud, simple, insouciant pose ; ah, Sir Hector only boasts of one thing—no one walks or moves like a Merivale, and that is just it. But you must not stay too long, for here she is again. What ! don't you know her ?'

Not at the first glance. The black-hatted, red-petticoated, grey-cloaked maiden, was very like the picturesque figure that had that afternoon visited Mademoiselle's schoolroom ; but Bridget had not yet seen Miss Merivale in silk and lace, and now the full-length figure standing in a white flowing transparent dress, her arms bare, her slender hands simply laid one upon the other, a pink rose hanging from one the only positive colour in her dress, for a moment perplexed her.

'Ah, that is only just put up. So proud my lady is of it, but I think Sir Hector still likes the other the best. He likes a daughter of his, he says, in clothes that rain wont hurt ; but, oh ! her throat and arms are so fair, so sweet, I think it a shame they should be all muffled up there, if that was her only portrait. And now we must be going. Ah ! but you will like to see your Mrs. Arnold's sister.'

‘Is that Mrs. Arnold’s sister? Had she one?’

‘Yes, this one, see, died 1832; she was just eighteen. Such a pretty girl old Lady Merivale says she was, and so one sees, though that short-waisted white dress is so trying and unbecoming,—so tall, so straight, so slim.’

‘And did Lady Merivale bring her up?’

‘Yes, for three, no, four years, the young ladies were both brought up with Sir Hector’s sister. In India she is now. Their father, Captain Merivale, died very young, and his wife, too, and old Sir John was their guardian. Lady Merivale never talks of them much, and I notice Sir Hector passes this by without notice, or any jest or joke, and sometimes I think there is something sad and mysterious about it; I think Sir Hector would have married her, poor thing, if she had not died so young. See, he would be himself only just twenty then, too young for your Englishmen to marry, *n’est-ce pas?*’

Mademoiselle’s sunny face and open grey eyes were serious and sad, and so were Bridget’s too. There was in the expression of the young features before her something so touching, so sweet; something so appealing, as if, young as she had died, life were too dear to part with,—as if Mademoiselle’s story might well be true.

And so it was, but there was a deeper sorrow behind it, one into which no casual observer could pry. Emily Merivale had died not appealing against the decree that so young she must die, but against the decree which had broken and crushed the young life within her,—Sir John’s obstinate refusal to allow his young heir to wed his ward. Not only

because she was penniless, but because, though he forbore to tell the young girl this, consumption had already made such ravages in both their families that he dreaded intermarriages.

And when but one year later Emily Merivale, though watched and guarded with every care that wealth and affection could supply, died at Marseilles, the kind hearted old man might well feel he had been more than justified in a refusal which had cost him so dearly ; but not so his son. And the last pang of Sir John Merivale's life had been, that his son still thought his hard-heartedness alone had caused his cousin's death.

And yet in two years Sir Hector married as great a contrast as he could find, a woman two years older than himself. And here lay the great bitterness of his life ; had he thus escaped the evils his father had predicted for himself and children, if he married his first love ? No ! he looked at poor Robert, and his heart rebelled as much as ever against the cold prudence which had, as he considered, marred the whole happiness of his life.

'Ah ! that is the hall-door !' as in fact the door closed behind the Vicar ; 'can it be my lady ? Ah, no, your pastor ; but I think, please, we had better be going downstairs.'

Bridget delayed one minute, now first catching sight of the party on the lake and watching Sir Hector, who had given up skating, run across the park, catch up Mr. Arnold, and putting his arm through the Vicar's, walk on briskly with him.

'Arnold, do you know I am going to consult

you ?' began the Squire. ' I am beginning to awaken to the fact that my boys are growing up around me ; it makes me quite aged to be thinking of their future. But I have been, and the result is Hector is for the army, and Harry has no wish to change his present easy mode of life, but I think he'll do for the navy, eh ?'

' If he has a taste that way.'

' Why, he's a taste no way, I believe, but for a gun or a pair of skates, just now at least. But he has plenty of fun and love of adventure in him, and has no taste for learning, certainly ; so really school and college would be but thrown away on him. And I'm not going to put any son of mine in orders for Elton Merivale itself, I can tell you.'

' I am very glad to hear it.'

' Yes ; well then, the next, George, you know ; why, Agnes tells me he's eleven, and ought to be at school ; and so he ought. You know Mr. Wyatt has left us, got a government clerkship, and I find three loose sons rather more than I can manage with temper. Eton or Harrow, which do you say for him ?'

' Oh, of course, all my prejudices are in favour of Harrow.'

' So are mine ; but I believe Agnes will never let me rest till I decide for Eton. All her brothers are Etonians, you see, and she thinks it more aristocratic. For my part, I'm rather like the American ambassador, Rufus King, who sent his sons to Harrow, just because it's the only school where no distinction is shown to rank.'

‘Well, you are surrounded by relations formerly at one or the other, and are therefore the best judge.’

‘And I say Harrow ; but for all that I’m a very hen-pecked man in secret ; so if it’s Eton after all, don’t betray me.’

‘Oh, no !’

‘It will be a horrible break up.’

‘Yes ; but I’m very glad. Much better they should be away from home and have an object in life.’

‘Yes, it is time they were away. But—I don’t like turning Dicksy, Pecksy, and Flapsy out of the nest, I can tell you.’

‘Boys get spoilt at home !’

‘Ah, but a public school is such a world of iniquity ;’ and Sir Hector sighed.

‘Yet most wonderfully improved since you and I were at one. Besides, does private tuition ever answer ? Do boys brought up at home turn out a bit better, even on an average equally good and useful men, with those who have gone through the ordeal of public school life ?’

‘If you are thinking of myself, modesty compels me to answer, no !’ answered Sir Hector, demurely.

‘No ; at the moment I forgot,’ said the Vicar, heartily ; ‘but I am not sure that I do not include you as one of the proofs that home education wants at least the emulation, the inspiriting spur, and competition of a public school.’

‘Forgive me, there ; *I* didn’t choose my own method of instruction, nor even my tutor ; perhaps

if my father had been happier in his selection, I might have been a very different man,' with dry solemnity.

'Perhaps so,' answered Mr. Arnold, more gravely than Sir Hector liked.

'I know better,' he cried warmly; 'you did all for me man could do; I may have faults in plenty, I don't deny it, but without you, Heaven only knows what folly and sin would by this time have lain at my door. You think me very thoughtless, but surely I am far-seeing enough here about my sons. Indeed Hector's going to some preparatory school for the army after Christmas is quite settled, the school itself all but,—and Harry must be going to Portsmouth and learn to rough it before much longer. Poor fellows! I hate it, but I hope it's for their good. I tell you what it is, Arnold, I think they are growing tall and strong enough to be a great trial to poor Robert.'

Tears almost started to the Vicar's eyes, so touched was he by this sacrifice of all Sir Hector's cherished prejudices and pleasures for the sake of his invalid son.

'But never let him have an idea of it,' added the Squire eagerly, 'only—I tell you everything, Arnold, and do you know once or twice it has struck me that the sight of them so full of spirit and strength has been more than the poor fellow could bear—that he was growing jealous of them; an ugly word, but who can wonder at it? We have never had any family quarrels, I can't bear them, and to save my children from the shadow of them, I'd sacrifice anything else; send both the boys off to India after

poor Mary, rather than risk any soreness and jealousy amongst them all here.'

They had reached the park-gate. 'Well, I wont come any further ; you'll be punctual to six, Arnold? I'm glad *you're* for Harrow ; if I have any voice in the education of my own sons, Harrow it shall be ; if not, you'll keep my secret, and not expose my humiliation to the world. Good-bye.'



CHAPTER X.

'OUR MARGARET.'

He that hath a wife and children, hath given hostages to fortune, for they are impediments to great enterprises.—
BACON.

SIR HECTOR strode briskly back to the Hall; the Vicar walked rather slowly to the Vicarage, and when he entered, went to his study, and sat thoughtfully, a little despairingly over the low embers, instead of finishing his sermon as he had said he should do, and had meant to do, when parting with Robert. What were his meditations? Such as these, reader; and how many they beset!

'How easily Sir Hector talks of setting first one boy, then another afloat, no matter where, no matter at what cost! And I? what can I do for my poor boys? Oh, if Frank could but go to a public school, all might be well with him yet. He has abilities, plenty of good sense—with competition to rouse him, school-fellows to knock him into sociability, plenty of out-of-door games to enliven him, and a home that it was a treat to come back to twice a year, he might grow up a happy man yet. And I am compelled to keep him at home and see his talents unused, his temper souring—making myself hateful to my own son!' Here the Vicar almost groaned.

'Ought I to sacrifice everything to save him? Poor Mary and all? Give up Miss Storey and the pony carriage, and pinch ourselves still tighter? I always have doubted about Miss Storey—and yet with Mary so eager to learn, poor thing! and the younger ones in spite of all her care running to waste; I don't see how it could have been right not to have her. And the carriage, who would buy it, or poor Daisy? What would Anna do without them? And then Johnnie, oh! if he could but have scope anywhere, any opportunity, how he would fight his way up. There's Harry Merivale doesn't know what to choose; whilst my boy has been longing for the army these two years—army! might as well long for the moon!' And in his vehemence the Vicar upset the fire-irons.

This roused him: he rose, put the dying coals together, fanned them into a flame, lighted his candle, and then stood a minute in thought, his arms tight-folded across him, heaved a deep, heavy sigh, stood a few minutes longer battling hard with himself, and then, not standing, prayed,

'Oh God, help me. Give me strength to resist jealousy and envy, to battle on cheerfully, to be content, as it is Thy will, to see my family growing up very differently from what I could have wished—for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'

He rose, sighed again, then took up his candle, and going resolutely to the cupboard by the mantelpiece, took out a box of old sermons, and began looking them through rapidly for the one he wanted.

'I am quite sure I have that quotation some-

where, in one of these old boxes. I remember writing it out in full on the flyleaf for the chance of my ever wishing to quote it all. I might finish my sermon without it, to be sure—just state its sense ; but a man's own words are far more telling ;' and he continued his search.

'Poetry ! this must be it ! Why, no—what is it ? oh, 'Our Margaret,'—dear me, dear me, to think Frank Arnold was ever young enough to write a tale ! to think that what I was once so proud of, should have been smuggled in here and have lain hidden so many years. Poor old thing ! how fusty and old-fashioned it looks. Ah ! that motto ; poor Emily hunted it out for me at the Hall, little guessing it was meant to head a tale. I was far too shy both of her and Anna then to give the slightest suspicion. Let me see ; the opening scene, I really think, was rather good.'

He turned the flyleaf over and read. After twenty years the tale read as another's, and so he smiled and said, 'That's well put,' forgetting it was his own ; then laughed at this self-approbation, and read on. Old scenes, old days, very pleasant days, revived within him as he read. A remark of poor Emily Merivale's had suggested that conversation ; this description of the heroine was no other than his then conception of his present wife. How lovely, how unapproachable she had seemed then ! How faded, how inexpressibly dear she was now !

'I wonder where she is,' said the Vicar, pausing. 'I will read it to her, and see how it strikes a fresh ear. No one will publish my sermons—one hope gone ; but this seems to me full at least of life

and freshness, very different from anything I could do now.'

Candle in hand he walked across to the dining-room, in his eagerness opening the door rather roughly, and arousing Mrs. Arnold, who was half asleep on the sofa.

'You, Frank! Oh, it's not time to dress.'

'No, only half-past four. Did I wake you?'

'No, never mind. So you have left them all. I thought I heard you come in a quarter of an hour ago, but was too lazy to come and see; but I am glad it must have been only one of the children.'

'Ah, it was I, I dare say; but I went straight to the study, for I wanted to finish my sermon, and—was rather cross.'

'Have you done it? Can't you bring it here? Ah, perhaps, that is it.'

'Why, no,' answered the Vicar, a little faltering in his purpose, now brought face to face with it, and even finding his cheeks still young enough to colour at the prospect of the first public reading of his work—'No, not a sermon, but a story. Do you know, twenty years ago, Annie, I was rather given to writing tales, but really had forgotten all about them till this evening: in looking for an old sermon, I stumbled on this.'

'A tale! You write stories! When?' cried Mrs. Arnold, full of eager interest.

'When I was the demure tutor at the Hall. Before Lady Merivale took to having me in the drawing-room every evening, when I found solitary evenings very dull; in short, had nothing better to do. Could you stand one?'

‘Stand it? Oh, Frank, like it so very much. Why did you never tell me before? Where are the others? Only we must have more light;’ and she sprang up, lighted another candle, and placed it on a little table beside her husband.

‘And you must lie down again; and let me sit so. Is the light out of your eyes?’

‘Yes; but I want to see you.’

‘Very well. If I *am* ashamed of it, you must remember it was written before I had a wife or child, was scarcely even on the verge of love, and so knew next to nothing of real life;’ nevertheless, middle-aged man as he was, the Vicar hemmed a little before beginning, and at the first touch of sentiment, felt the blood tingle in his cheeks, and glanced up to see if his wife were not laughing, and he had not better lay the trash aside.

No, she was not laughing, nor asleep, only gazing at him with those sweet blue eyes, which to the Vicar had but grown lovelier with age.

And so he went on, and once more forgot as it were the tale were his. It was a record of fancies and feelings and aspirations so long ago discarded, sobered down, or unravelled one way or another, as to seem like records of another being. And so his voice became steady and earnest, and did full justice to the fresh, strong simplicity of ‘Our Margaret.’

The plot was very slight, but on it woven touches of natural feelings—simple, quiet, home love, that made the wife’s eyes glisten. Glimpses of a keenness of thought and intellect far beyond her still, though now she remembered thinking that when she married Frank Arnold all such themes would soon

become familiar and comprehensible. But no ; the hard battle of life had driven all such questions far, far away ; and now they rose again as shadowy, bodiless phantoms, yet as ghosts of very, very happy days.

The whole tale did not take more than half-an-hour to read, a happy chance, for both forgot all about time as it went on.

'Well !' answered Mr. Arnold at last, after two whole minutes' silence.

'Oh, Frank, what can I say?—no one but *you* could have written it.'

'Annie !'

'I mean it ; it is so pretty—seems so true. I do not like to criticise it—to remember it is only a story.'

'Ah, but do treat it as if you did not know the author, as you did poor 'Cecily' the other day.'

'Don't, Frank !'

'Well, make some remark, something to help me to improve it.'

'Frank, I would not have it touched, it is all so simple and straightforward and *vraisemblant* ; alter but one sentence, and you would make it patchy. One's whole being seems changed in these twenty years. Oh, how I wish dear Emily could have heard it. She would have criticised it ; she would have known what to say.'

Emily always reminded Mr. Arnold of Sir Hector ; and now the remembrance of Sir Hector happily aroused him to present life, and with it the consciousness that they were to dine at six at the Hall.

'My dear Anna, we are to be at the Merivales' at

six, and I declare it's twenty minutes past five and more now.'

Up Mrs. Arnold sprang and rang the bell for Marianne; deploring Mary's absence, scarcely knowing where to lay her hand on a single article of evening dress, and knowing how long Marianne would be in finding those to which her mistress, whilst dressing her hair, could direct her.

But when she hurried into her cold, chilly room, its blind still up and window open, showing as far as twilight could show the bitter cold without, on her sofa she saw her dress, and upon it gloves, scarf, bracelets, shoes—all she needed. She could not help calling in 'Frank,' to say, with glistening eyes,

'You must just see, 'our Mary's' forethought.'

Mr. Arnold came, saw, admired, and went away, determined that Mary should not be sacrificed to Frank—that Miss Storey should be kept at all hazards.

Both dressed as rapidly as possible, and Mrs. Arnold was only just so long after her husband in the hall as to hear him say,—

'What, the pony-carriage not round yet?'

Mrs. Arnold's cheek really grew pale.

'Oh, Frank!' she said, 'what will you say? I quite forgot to order it.'

'My dear! when I told you the last thing! when Lady Agnes is so particular! when they have altered their dinner-hour on purpose to suit us! Really, I did think——' continued the Vicar, more angrily than he once in a year spoke to his wife.

'Frank, I am so sorry; do walk on. Say I have

a cold—headache—can't come. No, tell the truth ; say, knowing how I should delay you, I persuaded you to walk on alone. Lady Agnes will not find it very hard to forgive my absence.'

'Nonsense, my dear ; you accepted the invitation, and go you must somehow. Well, if you want a thing done, do it yourself.'

Mrs. Arnold was quite roused, and instead of sitting down and waiting patiently by the fire, as she would have done if herself only had been concerned, hurried towards the kitchen to send some one to hasten Thomas.

'Never mind, love ; don't go into the cold,' cried Mr. Arnold after her ; 'Thomas will be sure to be as quick as he can ; come and warm yourself by the fire before we start. Why, here he is, I declare ; really that man is worth his weight in gold !'

The wheels came nearer, Mr. Arnold opened the door, not to his own shabby pony-carriage and Thomas, but to a close carriage and pair and two servants, one of whom sprang down, touched his hat respectfully, and said his master had sent the carriage for Mrs. Arnold.

The Vicar found his wife, handed her in, the door was shut, and off they drove, at rather a different pace to poor Daisy's.

"Well, Sir Hector never did us so good a turn !" he cried, so relieved as to be almost exultant.

'No ; it's very comfortable,' answered his wife, leaning back comfortably and composedly.

The clock was striking six as they were ushered into a blaze of light in the lesser drawing-room.

There is no need to say how hearty were Sir Hector's greetings, how charming Miss Merivale looked in her pale blue silk, how Hector and Harry at once claimed the Vicar as their friend, nor how good and well ordered a dinner awaited them in the dining-room. And the Vicar, though he never grumbled at the chilled gravy and cold vegetables at home, enjoyed the contrary as much as any other man would have done.

The four boys, who had taken to a second dinner very kindly, soon followed the ladies, leaving the Squire and the Vicar sitting on either side of the fire perfectly happy. Really the smaller drawing-room seemed quite full when they returned to it for tea, with the three governesses, their eight pupils, the four boys, and Robert, to whom Johnnie, on the floor beside him, was talking eagerly.

A merry evening followed ; a game of magic music, at Emma Merivale's request, which the boys had tried to pooh-pooh down, but which Sir Hector made as amusing as an evening at Astley's ; another at Pope Joan, by which he did the same, somehow contriving at the end that every boy and girl found him or herself enriched by two shillings.

'What, no one lost?' asked little timid Emma, opening her brown eyes. To her neat mind the money had been flying about in reckless and appalling confusion.

'Papa, of course,' answered George, old enough to be acute, not quite old enough not to be proud of showing that he was so.

'I ? I deny it !' cried Sir Hector, shaking a purse so laden with shillings and sixpences it was indeed

hard to believe that one of either of such coins had been abstracted. ‘Now, Netta, let us get the table out of the way and have a dance.’

‘My dear Hector,’ began Lady Agnes.

‘You think the boys could do it better than Netta. Well, yes, that’s right, put your shoulder to the wheel, boys ; now, Netta, give us a tune.’

‘Miss Campbell will play what you wish, I dare say,’ said Lady Agnes, slightly inclining towards that lady.

‘And Netta also, I’ve no doubt ;’ and it was Miss Merivale who opened the piano and sat down, jumping up, however, in a minute or two to arrange the little couples.

Sir Hector surprised and abashed Mary by coming up and offering her his arm, with a request for her hand. But Sir Hector’s *partner* was never the conspicuous person, and all danced with as much spirit as Antoinette played.

Then followed a polka, which Sir Hector and his daughter started, and made such a pretty sight that even the little ones behind were scarcely noticed ; and when Miss Campbell turned the polka into a waltz, the celerity with which the father and daughter darted round and round the room delighted some country eyes and greatly enlightened others.

‘You call *that* a waltz, now ?’ asked the Vicar, as they ceased.

‘Yes : more fun, but none of the grace of the old one, two, three, I allow. Miss Campbell, if you are not tired, will you just play us one of the old Elizabethan ?’

Miss Campbell complied, and no one could do less than allow what an incomparably more elegant dance it was.

‘Ah, Netta! if I were you,’ said Mr. Arnold, admiringly, ‘I’d never dance the other. One is a dance, the other a race, very wonderful, but not very well suited for public exhibition.’

‘No?’ asked Netta, opening her blue eyes; sorry to differ from Mr. Arnold, but most decidedly doing so; ‘oh! I expect our grand-daughters will beat our *valse à deux temps* as completely as we do our grandmothers’ old slow minuets.’

Somehow, the evening had already sped away. It struck ten as Netta was speaking, and the Vicar, with a smile, left the discussion, collected and carried off his large party as quickly as he could, and went home very happy, and much pleased that Robert, instead of keeping in the Library by himself, or in a corner with Sophy by his side, had stayed in the full brunt of the merriment, and laughed as heartily as any one at his father’s absurd antics and performances.



CHAPTER XI.

HOPES.

‘I must be cruel only to be kind.’

There is nothing like love;
 And when the heart doth ache,
 And is nigh to break,
 Nothing like love!

In our most sad distress,
 What like the tenderness
 Of a little hand that glides
 Into ours?—though nought besides,
 Not e’en a word.
 Words are all vain;
 Words too often give
 Pain, only pain;—
 But the pressure of a hand
 What mourning spirit can withstand?—

H. M. RATHBONE.

MR. ARNOLD lay down to rest that night with a busy brain. Could it be that a new source of income was being opened to him, just when so much needed? That he might be exempt yet from the hardships of an English clergyman’s lot; that, let the numbers of his family increase, their needs and wants double, or their health fail and luxuries become necessities, nothing that he can do can increase his income; if he work from dawn to night, if he put every power of intellect in motion, he cannot augment his annual income one penny.

The clergyman alone cannot marry on the hope of working his way up in his profession, and thus being enabled to meet fresh calls as they arise ; or, if he do so, how bitterly is he taught his error !

But now the Vicar began to hope a way might be opening to him, and truly it was time that it should do so ; he had dreaded for years to think of the scanty provision which his wife and children would inherit whenever his own life ended, and yet the increasing wants of his family were already making the payment of this very insurance a sore struggle. And his sons, how could they get on and help their mother and sisters, with no advantages of education, with no likelihood of a fair opening being offered to any one of them ?

Long ago, Mr. Arnold had met all these miserable anxieties, faced them through, and decided that, helpless as he was against them, dwelling upon them would but make him sour and sad, and that, therefore, he would *never* dwell on them ; but be content in making the children's home as happy as he could to all whilst it lasted, and in trying to do his duty not a whit the less faithfully because he had no *earthly* goal of reward set before him. Such had been his principle for years, but to-night he thought his troubles through again with some latent pleasure, for might not he now at last be about to conquer some of those evils which had so long conquered him ?

‘No doubt Annie is prejudiced,’ he thought ; ‘but I do think, as she says, there is a certain originality about the tale, and my poor mother, the only other woman who ever heard it, clever and sar-

castic as she could be, said the same. I don't like it all—too much meditation, too little action—but, dear me, surely it must have more sense in it than that trash I was reading the other night. I will—yes, I will make the venture, and send it to *Blackwood*. A high shot, but, as has been said in a more serious matter, he who aims at the sun, though he does not reach it, will hit a higher mark than he who aims at a tree.'

The Vicar was up early the next morning, carried his candle into the study when the passages were still chilly and dark, took out his tale and a quire of sermon paper, and began a fair copy of 'Our Margaret.' He wrote vigorously for about ten minutes, then his fingers grew very cold, his eyes very weary of the endless looking up and down, but he persevered till half-past eight (now the nominal breakfast hour), hid his manuscript out of sight, turned out into the drive, and walked up and down it rejoicing that half his task was over, doubting whether, if it had been otherwise, he should have had courage to face more than one other morning of such uninteresting monotony.

The next morning, either he was up a little earlier or worked a little harder, for by half-past eight 'Our Margaret' was not only finished, but rolled up, sealed, and directed, and the short note to the editor written, before Mary came to say they were ready for prayers.

Mr. Arnold walked in to Massing by himself that afternoon, posted his MS. and letter, and walked home so blithe and light-hearted, feeling so young with the daring and secrecy of his venture, that he

found himself whistling as he entered his own village.

With a light heart, a heart made light by hope, he entered his own house, and it was well he carried some brightness within him. The dining-room door was open, and the first sound that reached him was some complaint, quite loud and angry, from his wife, and a fierce 'I tell you I didn't, mother,' from Frank; and when Mr. Arnold entered the room, he found his wife vexed and flushed, holding sobbing Amabel on her lap, and Frank standing up against the wall, hot, fierce, and resolute enough to defy the Inquisition itself.

'Oh, Frank, I am glad indeed you are come in!' began Mrs. Arnold, indignantly; 'Frank has knocked Amabel against the table only because she came near him; and look at her poor little arm!'

It was a piteous sight, at least to so fond a father. The little elbow bruised and bleeding, and the sweet, scared little face above, beholding her injuries so sadly and ruefully.

Frank felt how everything was against him—the darling of every one the injured party, his mother answered impertinently, himself, the general scape-grace, the aggressor—and just to defy it all answered again, 'I tell you, mother, I did not do it on purpose.'

He fully expected a sharp blow and to be immediately sent out of the room; but, instead of his usual summary treatment, Mr. Arnold turned round and said, gravely but far from unkindly, 'Frank, if you cannot let me hear what your mother has to

say without interrupting her in such an unbecoming manner, you had better go across to the study.'

Frank stood astonished one minute, then followed his father's advice.

'And now we must bind up this dear little arm before we hear mamma even, mustn't we?' said the Vicar, kneeling down by his wife and child and examining the injuries. 'Shall I hold you while mamma fetches some warm water and rag, my precious child?'

'No, zoo get them, papa;' and papa did, and then it was, 'zoo bathe it, papa, zoo put it on;' and when the bandage was on and the injury so frightening to a child safe out of sight, the other whole little arm was put tight round the Vicar's neck, a soft, still wet cheek, close to his, and his little daughter said, caressingly, 'zoo dear doctor!'

Did Mr. Arnold repent, then, that he was the father of eight children? Oh, no.

'I did not hurt my sweet much?'

'I knew zoo could not help it,' answered Amabel, simply.

'There, now lie back in mamma's arms, like her great baby, that you are, and go to sleep.' And by the time the Vicar had carried out basin and sponge, Amabel had very nearly obeyed his commands.

'And now, Anna, what does it all mean?' he asked.

'Indeed what Frank meant I can't say,' answered his wife, still roused and angry; 'he has been sitting here carpentering most of the afternoon, the other children have been out with Miss Storey;

and just before you came in, Amabel, very eager to show the new cloak nurse had been making her doll, ran in; and as she passed he pushed her off, and her poor little elbow hit against the table.'

'She had not teased him?'

'No, poor little dear; nor said nor done anything except pass his side of the room.'

'And what passed when she fell?'

'I called out indignantly, 'Frank, you are always hurting the children!' and he answered, 'If they will come in the way, they must expect to be hurt;' and then I said, I wondered he was not ashamed to own he had hurt her on purpose; and so it went on till you came in, Frank as rude as could be.'

'I was afraid so from what I heard. Well, I did hope these troubles were ceasing;' and the Vicar crossed over to the study.

Here the delinquent was sitting on the window-seat looking out of window. The Vicar rejoiced that a quarter of an hour had perforce passed before he need attack him.

'Well, Frank,' he quietly began, determined, God helping him, no sullenness nor fierceness of his son's should excite himself to sharpness, 'it seems a bad business, but I have not heard what you have to say for yourself.'

'That I did not do it on purpose,' retorted Frank, stoutly.

'I quite believe you; *no one* would have hurt such a little child purposely; only you see, Frank, such an accident proves the wrongness and danger of your ordinary rough petulance towards the little

ones : twenty times you may push them off and hurt no one, the twenty-first this or worse occurs.'

Frank made no answer. He had had no idea that his one protestation would have been so immediately received, and so had prepared for nothing but a reiteration of this declaration, cost him what it might.

'And,' continued the Vicar, 'I believe that you not only did not do it on purpose, but that in your heart you are very sorry for having done it at all.'

There was a minute's silence, then Frank said gruffly, 'She isn't much hurt.'

'I think you should have added 'I hope' to that sentence, and made it a question. No, not very much, though I am afraid her arm will pain her a little for some days.'

'I'm sorry for that.'

'That's right. But you know, Frank, there is something for which you have more need to be sorry,—the tone in which you answered your mother.'

'She said I did it on purpose,' answered Frank, fiercely.

'Your general unkindness to the little ones—I don't mean to mince matters,—made her think so. I believe she was mistaken, but if you want to escape misapprehension throughout life, Frank, your general conduct must be a good deal gentler, and more certain than it is now.'

'They are such bothers !'

'I don't mean to branch off into the general subject, the only thing under discussion is your present

duty, and that is to beg your mother's pardon for your disrespect to her.'

'And that I wont do!' cried Frank, fiercely; quite glad to have something at last to resist with all his might.

'I shall not try to force you to it,' answered Mr. Arnold, gravely and sadly; 'I do not wish to make my son a hypocrite simply to do his duty, and even here, with such a temper as yours—so fierce, so resentful, I really fear so glad to excite me to severity—I have little hope of making you apologize, because it is *right* to do so. Don't glory in so brave a temper, at least as you have hitherto shown it,' ended the Vicar, sternly, seeing a flash of triumph in Frank's steady brown eyes. 'It is the great handle the devil has against you; by means of it he makes you ashamed of doing right, and pride yourself upon enduring anything rather than own yourself wrong.'

'She shouldn't'—began Frank, rather awed and frightened, in spite of himself,—'have—'

'I am not going to discuss the point with you, Frank; your mother misjudged you I allow, but I cannot allow that this, or anything else, justifies her son in using the insolent tone you did towards her, nor can I ever think well of you till you repent it, and own that you repent it. I leave you to think it over,—to think *better* of it, I hope; but this you will never do unless you ask the help of Him who alone is stronger than the evil temper within you.'

Mr. Arnold went out, and shutting the door behind him, went upstairs. He did not wish to encounter even his little daughter. He felt as if

the struggle that would decide Frank's whole after-life, might be even now being fought ; could he hope with the right success ?

Frank, left alone, could not but feel his father's generous justice and marvellous patience, nevertheless at first tried to dwell on his wrongs, to glory in being ready to brave the extremity of his father's displeasure rather than give way ; but as minute after minute passed by, he began to perceive, then, in spite of his endeavours to drive the glimmering perception away—*saw clearly* how slight his wrongs were, how little he had to brave. His father had issued no command, no threat, so it could not be the consequences of obstinate disobedience that he was defying. What was he then braving ? He remembered his father's words, and trembled, as he felt it was no less than the voice of his own conscience.

He had never before thus viewed any collision with his father. As years passed on he had found himself in frequent disgrace, and had come to the determination, almost unconsciously, that as he found he could bear disgrace and punishment bravely enough for his own peace, he would quietly go his own way, and if this way brought either upon him, put up with the inconvenience, but let it not in the least hinder him from going his own way next time. And how well he had abided by this miserable, headstrong determination, both himself and his father knew to like cost.

Why could he not abide by it now ? He had meant to do so, unconsciously, for habit had made such conduct almost nature without ever bringing

its purpose before the boy in actual words. Oh, how he wished his father had not been so quiet—so forbearing. Why had he not scolded him sharply, ordered him to beg his mother's pardon, threatened him, spoken so that he could have answered impertinently ; done anything but treat him as he had done ; have left him with nothing to do, nor to brave nor dare but his God, and the conscience his God had given him ?

He tried to shake off such feelings, to determine to stand by his first resolve not to beg his mother's pardon. It seemed all he had left to stand by, and he certainly did feel very angry at her thinking he could have *meant* so to hurt little Mabel. Poor fellow, he had that comfort left, and he made the most of it, and nursed his anger as he best could, for in spite of all his care it would grow fainter and fainter. Oh ! if his father did not come quickly, it would be quite gone altogether, and he would have only a shadow to cling to after all.

Just as he thought this, there was a little knock ; Frank did not answer : then the handle, with great effort, turned, and a little fair face peeped in, half frightened. ' Papa !'

No answer.

' No one here ?' timidly advancing.

' No one ; at least not who you want,' said Frank, crossly.

' Oh ;' and Amabel was hurrying away. Then the little feet pattered back again, and coming up to her brother, who was still on the window-seat, ' Frank, don't mind for me ; don't let papa mind for me ; I'm not hurt.'

Frank could not tell how nor why, was very angry with himself the next minute for doing it, he bent down suddenly and kissed the little cheek, roughly, it is true, but with all his heart, and, poor boy! his heart was a heavier and sadder burden just then than he well knew how to bear.

‘Zoo didn’t mean it, did oo? and look, papa has done it up nice and safe! He wasn’t angry, Frank, was he? Why do you stay here?’

‘Not because he was angry about that,’ answered Frank, sighing. He could give way before his little sister; she would be none the wiser for what he said or did, and it was a great comfort to give way.

‘Then why was he angry?’

‘He was not angry,’ Frank was forced to own.

‘And yet zoo sorry? Let me come and sit by zoo, if oo will stay away;’ and Amabel, clambering up the seat, squeezed herself in between Frank and the window. Frank did not help, did not hinder her. ‘Sorry,’ no; he was not staying there because he was ‘sorry,’ but because he was not sorry. And yet, was he not? If not, why was he so wretched, so miserable, as if he longed to run away from every one, and cry his great burden away in tears, he who had never let a tear escape him these five years.

So the two stayed about ten minutes, Amabel’s little head falling more and more heavily against Frank’s shoulder, till when Mr. Arnold came in she was fast asleep.

‘Hush—don’t wake her,’ said Frank, tenderly, really forgetting who the new comer was likely to be, and why he would be coming.

The noise and light, however, had already startled and roused her.

‘Why, my little sweet!’ said the Vicar.

Mabel sat up bewildered, rubbing her blue eyes as if to unravel a great perplexity.

‘You, papa? Why, I’ve been asleep. Did I tire you, Frank?’ turning with her miniature Merivale considerate graciousness towards the boy, now hastily withdrawing his supporting arm.

‘No, not at all,’ answered Frank, in an undertone. He could not make up his mind even to *spea*k roughly to her now, but he did not want his father to note the difference.

‘Awake now? Well, then, I must carry you off to Miss Storey; she is telling fairy tales in the schoolroom,’ and the Vicar took his little daughter in his arms, and carried her away, her eyes to the last minute fixed wistfully over his shoulder on poor Frank.

When the door was shut, ‘Papa, stop one moment.’

‘Am I hurting you, sweet?’

‘No—but zoo promise me something,’ laying her head, with an innocent mixture of caressing shyness and coquetry upon his shoulder.

‘What?’

‘You mustn’t know,’ with her little saucy laugh.

Ah, Vicar! you must take care you do not make your sweet your tyrant.

‘No, papa cannot promise anything, even to his little Mabel, without knowing what it is she wants.’

‘Can’t you? But you will do it, wont you? Make poor Frank happy again. Oo know I’m not hurt, and he says you weren’t angry, and yet he is

so sad,' with an accent of childish, pitying piteousness in the last three words.

'And so *you* have been comforting him? Well, that is just what papa would like to do, if he could; and it is nearly tea-time, so I mustn't wait about it. Good-bye, my precious,' and he opened the school-room door, and, setting her inside, went back again himself.

'Well, my boy,' he said, kindly, as Frank kept his face perversely away from him.

Frank made no answer, indeed could not trust himself to answer.

'You cannot quite resolve to humble yourself; it will indeed be a humiliation in your own eyes, but one which would do you infinite good; and in the eyes of God and His angels a most blessed victory over your worst enemy—self.'

Still Frank did not say one word.

'Well, then, I can but leave you—you know your duty; it is only the strength to do, which you need, and that *I* cannot give. God help you, my poor boy; God grant that you do not let the devil have the victory over you;' and Mr. Arnold went away almost sadder-hearted than his son.

'Papa,' cried Frank after him, but his lips made no sound, great choking sobs stopped all utterance, and he did not try again. He drove the tears back resolutely, and then sat down by the fire, his face in his hands—deserted, oh! if it should be by more than his earthly father.

Suddenly he rose, opened the study door, hurried across the passage, saw his mother was alone, hesitated, went in, went up to her, and said, in a voice

at once firm and faltering, 'Mamma, I beg your pardon for speaking as I did.'

'My dear Frank,' cried Mrs. Arnold, 'scarcely having heard him come in, and now alarmed by his voice and manner, which seemed as if he were putting a force on himself that nearly broke his heart, 'Why—never mind, Frank—never mind; I did not know then Mabel was so little hurt. Stay a minute, Frank;—but Frank was off, hurried through the hall, rushed up the stairs, and in a minute more his door slammed behind him, and the boy flung himself on his bed, and buried his head in his pillow to smother his sobs.

Sobs that he had yielded. Poor Frank!

Mr. Arnold heard that slam, and it told him all, that Right had conquered, but not without almost a fiercer struggle than the boy could bear.

He went to the dining-room, and there found his wife looking anxious and uneasy.

'Frank,' she began, 'I hope you have not been forcing that poor boy to beg my pardon; he came in here just now so odd, I am quite frightened about him.'

'Thank God,' said the Vicar, from the bottom of his heart. 'No, I have not forced him, except by treating him as a Christian, a responsible being, old enough to choose good rather than evil, poor fellow! but I do hope, Annie, bitter as it has been to him, he will hereafter feel my cruelty was mercy.'

Very soon the little ones came in clamorous for tea; but when they were seated that there was no Frank did not surprise his father.

'I'll run and tell him,' said Anna, starting up.

‘No, Anna, stop a minute,’ said Mr. Arnold at once. ‘I don’t think Frank will wish to come. He is in no disgrace,’ seeing Anna’s consternation and the glances round, ‘but has been a good deal upset, and we must all be the kinder to him.’

It was evident Mr. Arnold meant to explain no further. No one said a word more.

‘Upset; her dear Frank upset,’ thought Anna, thoroughly perplexed. ‘What could papa mean? When Mary was ‘upset’ she cried, but Frank had never cried in his life.’

Nevertheless, Frank was crying now, deep, passionate sobs, hot scalding tears, beating about his bed in his misery, trying in vain to restrain one single cry.

Not till the little ones had gone up to bed did Mr. Arnold disturb or molest him. The devil had gone out of him, but was rending him before departing entirely, and, alas! even then, in this mortal life, it would be but ‘for a season.’ But as the clock struck eight, and all but Mary, Johnnie, and Anna were sent off, the Vicar went up to his son’s door and knocked.

Frank made no answer; so, after waiting a few minutes, Mr. Arnold entered. Frank was sitting beside his bed, which he had tried hastily to smooth, so worn, so dejected, so heavy-eyed and mannered, his father’s kind heart bled for him.

‘My poor boy,’ he said, tenderly, ‘I can’t bear your staying up here in the cold. If you don’t like to come down to the dining-room, there’s the study; I’ve kept up the fire, thinking you might like it.’

‘I don’t mind the cold, thank you,’ in a voice vainly struggling to be even and indifferent.

‘But I do for you. We shall have you quite ill. I wish you would come down.’

‘It does not matter;’ but Frank turned his head to the wall, and burst into tears.

Mr. Arnold stood irresolute one moment. ‘A boy cannot bear to be seen in tears,’ he thought, but warm kindness overcame cold prudence, and he went up to his son, turned his passive face towards him, and kissed him as a mother might have done. Why had not his mother been with him long ago ?

‘Oh, papa, don’t !’

‘Why not ?’

‘I can’t bear you to be so kind to me. It—it made me give way before—beg her pardon.’

‘And surely you are very glad you did ?’

‘No—yes—no. I thought it would take the weight away, make me happier again, but it only——’

‘Seems to make it heavier. Ah, Frank ! I know that feeling. When I was a little boy, I told my mother a lie ; it made me unhappy at the time, but I was little and forgot it. Four years after, when I was home for the holidays, it suddenly flashed across me as I was saying my prayers. I thought I would go and confess it that minute, but I was a coward and afraid, and could not bear to bring such shame upon myself. How wretched I was all that night, knowing I ought to tell her ; once in the middle of the night going to her door, but I could not. And—I never told her till the next night had come round again. I thought then I should be

quite happy again ; but no, I was almost more wretched—a different kind of wretchedness, mind—than the night before.’

‘I can’t see why——’

‘Nor could I then ; but now I think it was, indeed feel sure it was, this. An earthly illness is not cured the first minute the patient consents to use the right medicine—may often for the time seem aggravated. And with our minds, God’s reward to us for confessing a sin is one very bitter to taste—it is a more scrupulous conscience, a clearer sense of sin, an opening of our eyes especially to the greatness of that very sin we have acknowledged and repented of.’

Frank did not answer, nor did his father try to make him do so. There was a few minutes’ silence, then Mr. Arnold took up his candle and said, ‘Well, I think, perhaps, you would rather not come down, but you must have something to eat ; mamma shall bring you up some tea.’

‘No, don’t.’

‘But I shall. We have no business to let bodily discomfort increase our mental ; so either come down to the study and have it by the fire, or else get into bed and have it there. Cold and hunger will make you quite ill. Which do you say ?’

‘Oh, here !’

‘Good night, then.’

‘Good night, papa.’

But Mr. Arnold did not let his son’s hand go so quickly.

‘What, can’t you give me one word more ?’ with a kindly smile.

‘What’s the use?’ said Frank, dejectedly. ‘I know you are very kind, but I shall only go and vex you another time just as much, and most likely not be sorry after it at all. And, whatever I am, I wont say ‘thank you,’ and then be a hypocrite.’



CHAPTER XII.

ROBERT.

Largely Thou givest, gracious Lord,
 Largely Thy gifts should be restored,
 Freely Thou givest, and thy word
 Is 'Freely give.'
 He only who forgets to hoard
 Has learnt to live.

KEBLE.

FRANK awoke the next morning rather earlier than usual, and then, as the events of yesterday rushed upon him, remembered that he had never learnt his lessons.

His first impulse was to spring out and learn them at once. His second that bed was so comfortable he must stay a little longer in it. Besides, his father would know how it was, and could not be angry after all that had passed last night.

But still Frank lay uneasily; it seemed imposing on his father's kindness not to get up and learn his lessons when he *had* remembered them in time to do so, and was most thoroughly awake; and yet, who can bear to leave their warm bed on a bitter winter's morning? if even on any other morning they can face such a proceeding with fortitude and composure.

'Half-past seven,' thought Frank, whose bed

stood just opposite the window whence the church clock was becoming dimly visible as the dark December morning dawned ; ‘ Oh ! I should have more than time if I got up now. I’ll get up at the quarter, and if I’m quick shall manage very well then.’

And so he lay watching the hand round to the quarter, not quite happily, but when it did reach it sprang out at once, dressed, as only a boy can, and, running down, found his books and betook himself to the dining-room rug. But breakfast was rather more punctual than usual, and Mary’s fidgettiness to make it so angered Frank not a little.

‘ Why can’t you let things be ? ’ he asked, crossly, as after making tea she put the kettle on the stand across him ; ‘ mamma won’t be down yet.’

‘ She’s just ready, and it’s five minutes after the half-hour now.’

‘ Well, what does it signify ? ’

‘ It does signify,’ answered Mary, resolutely, evidently determined to argue the point out ; ‘ if——’

‘ Oh, pray don’t argufy ! ’ cried Frank, stopping his ears at once. ‘ I have no time to listen to all your grand genteel reasons ; ’ and he turned back to his books.

However, his mother entered almost the same minute ; prayers quickly followed, then breakfast, and now Mr. Arnold was ready for the lessons almost as soon as it was over. Therefore Frank went into the study with one he had but twice read over.

The first two, however, he said so remarkably well that the Vicar was astonished, and hoped yesterday might have proved the beginning of better things in more ways than he had dared hope. After the first sentence of the last, however, poor Frank stuck inexplicably.

‘Why, how’s this?’

‘I quite forgot them last night,’ said Frank, colouring.

‘Oh, well! never mind; then it had better be left altogether,’ and Mr. Arnold turned to other things.

But when twelve came and he was free, Frank did not feel quite content; and, unfortunately, the first consequence was giving a very surly answer to John’s proposal that they should go up to the Merivales’ and see if they could not arrange a common skating party for the afternoon; the second, happily, that he took the book upstairs, and out of the noise of the dining-room soon learnt the lesson thoroughly, for he had always plenty of ability and a very good memory, and when the will was not wanting, soon mastered any task.

Then he ran down, knocked at the study door found his father in, and saying bluntly, ‘I know it now,’ laid the book before Mr. Arnold, to whom the lesson came as a very matter of fact reality in the midst of his first survey of another old tale which he had routed out from amongst its forgotten and discoloured fellows.

Frank, however, claimed his attention for only a few minutes, as he repeated with perfect fluency an equal quantity with that which only two days

before he had said so imperfectly as to make his father close the book with indignant impatience, and give him so severe a lecture on his idleness, that Frank had been somewhat alarmed for the consequences of a returned lesson not a good deal better said, and therefore had taken care to know it tolerably well before bringing it forward again, stolidly indifferent as he had outwardly appeared.

‘That’s something like a lesson,’ said Mr. Arnold now, giving back the book ; ‘but don’t think it an unfair advantage, Frank, knowing how you can learn when you have the will ; I can never take again many such as I have thought myself obliged to put up with before now.’

Frank did not quite like this ; however, he did not know how to object to it ; so took the book and went his way, still with a clearer heart than he had often left the study.

The next day was Sunday. I cannot say but that the Vicar looked forward to the morning’s post with almost as much impatience and eagerness as his governess had three months ago to his own long-coming answer. Was ‘Our Margaret’ really so superior to the ordinary run of periodical literature as to win instant attention and immediate acceptance ? or might it to impartial eyes have appeared so deficient in incident, so far from possessing interest for the present generation of readers of fiction, that it had been cast aside after the first cursory glance, and would be at once returned on his hands ? or, almost worse than all, might not the editor of such a periodical be so overwhelmed with contributions from writers already more or less

known, that 'Our Margaret' might, with many other equally neglected companions, have been thrown into the waste-paper basket to await a leisure day that would never come?

As usual, the Vicar was the first down-stairs on Sunday morning, and on the hall table already lay the post-bag. He took it up, delayed a minute, opened it, saying how silly he was to expect he could hear good or ill by return of post—but yes, there lay a solitary letter, and—his manuscript!

Poor Mr. Arnold! he tore open the letter, the politely worded, printed refusal, flung it into the dining-room fire, and felt sorely inclined to fling 'Our Margaret' after it. It may do a young writer good to go through the ordeal of a round of disappointments, but to a middle-aged man such a refusal is much more trying, is a very different matter. One feeling now possessed the Vicar. How could he have laid bare thoughts and feelings, so precious as almost to be sacred, to another man, one who had not thought them worthy of even one word of comment. He would never go through such an ordeal of shame and mortification again, yet—he would not burn it, felt already ashamed that he should ever have thought of finding so childish a vent to his vexation and disappointment.

The rush of little feet was heard on the staircase, and crossing to the study, Mr. Arnold put his manuscript out of his own sight, as well as that of others, and then came forth again to face the battle of life as he could.

Poor man! he did not succeed very well. It was a dull, rainy morning, and used as Englishmen and

children ought to be to all the changes of climate to which their country so constantly treats them, a cold foggy thaw is depressing enough to most people, without any mental trouble to increase such depression. Frank was the last ; Mr. Arnold spoke sharply to him and brought up the old scowl ; Carry was whining, and her father silenced her complaints so roughly, that a flood of tears was narrowly averted. He made the home party dull, and then felt ready to quarrel with them for being as little inclined to be cheerful as himself.

After the unpunctual breakfast came the elder children's catechism, and then the school, and then the service, and then the dinner ; and then at last could Mr. Arnold get a few minutes alone to mourn over his past ill-temper, to gather strength to try to remove the cloudiness he himself had caused, to ask for courage to bear such disappointment as a man and a Christian should bear it. And then he came forth again, very humbled in his own sight, yet thinking he was but tasting of the cup he had *morally forced* his own son to drain but two days before ; and that it was well that a father should be compelled to know himself what such humiliation in one's own sight really cost.

Yet after all, his wife at the end of the day, when the children were asleep, or at least in bed, said,

‘ Frank, you are not well ? ’

‘ Quite well, dear, thank you,’ tenderly and sadly.

‘ But something has vexed you—not Frank again ? ’

‘ No, no ; if I am vexed with any one, it is with

myself. Nothing's the matter, love—nothing for you to worry about. Now let us get to our own quiet reading.'

The next day, Johnnie as usual went up to the Hall, finding the boys not disposed to go out, but talking eagerly round Robert's sofa. 'I say, Johnnie,' was Hector's greeting, 'do you know it's all settled? I'm going to some place at Eltham—a Mr. Smith, Brown, or Jones. Jolly! don't you envy me?'

'Yes,' answered John, with a deeper meaning than any one thought. 'Mr. who? are there many boys?'

'About thirty, but not one I know; that's the only bother; Cousin James has just left. I say, Johnnie, how jolly it would be if you went too. You used to say you should be a soldier.'

'Did I?' asked Johnnie, as if it must have been very long ago, then.

'Yes; don't you remember it was Uncle John who first fired us both. I've kept firm to it ever since, whatever you have.'

'John means to be a man of peace, perhaps,' said Robert, now first taking part in the conversation. He had hitherto lain with his face away from the others, as if, which was the truth, the subject pained and tried him, and yet he could not escape it.

'Oh, a clergyman,' said Hector, looking disappointed; 'no, you don't mean it, Johnnie?'

'No, I don't think I shall be a clergyman, but a man of peace of some kind or other, I suppose,' answered Johnnie, with an effort at ease and cheerfulness.

‘How? what?’ asked Hector, impatiently.

‘I think Mr. Rogers is going to take me into his office when I am old enough.’

‘Mr. Rogers! who? what? What Rogers?—‘the old rascally attorney,’ as papa calls him?’

‘I don’t think he’s a rascal, or my father wouldn’t let me go to him,’ said Johnnie, stoutly and colouring high.

‘Oh, well, do you know, Johnnie, it’s very vexatious, for I have been thinking the whole morning, perhaps papa could persuade Mr. Arnold to let you go with me, and we’d keep together everywhere, artillery and all.’

John smiled, or attempted to smile, and turning to Robert, asked what he had been doing all day.

‘Reading—just as usual,’ answered Robert, putting his arm affectionately round the little fellow’s neck. ‘I am very glad you have come in to make a change, and I want you to look at my last grand water-colour attempt from Sophy’s sketch of the house—out there it is, if you don’t mind getting it. Thank you—you see I’ve got into an awful mess trying to work on on Saturday, when mamma took Sophy into Worcester.’

‘It isn’t so very bad.’

‘No; but it has been a good deal worse, and I called in Alston, and he made one or two very happy suggestions,—in fact, the washing out nearly all I had put in. But I have made mamma promise I shall have Sophy for an hour after luncheon. I am afraid Miss Campbell’s keeping her in, to make up for it; she generally looks in for a minute or two about now. Ah! here she is—no, Netta.’

‘ Ah, Johnnie here !’ said Netta ; ‘ that’s right ; then, Robert, we wont read, but sit down and talk comfortably—it’s a horribly dry lot we are coming to ; I’ll read it to you after dinner instead.’

Robert smiled as if this were a good time that would not come, but made no objection, and lay till luncheon silent but amused by the animated conversation Antoinette kept up till the bell rang.

Johnnie stayed luncheon, and then ran back quickly to the Vicarage, to be home in time for lessons.

The afternoon lessons, as far as Mr. Arnold was concerned, lasted only till three, and then what did the Vicar do ? Why, after much thought and a considerable struggle with his vanity and pride, once more walked over to Massing, and posted ‘ Our Margaret,’ directed this time to *Fraser*.

‘ A forlorn hope,’ he thought, as he dropped the tale into the waste of letters, and the act became beyond control ; ‘ but, after all, I am glad I have tried it. Thanks to this new postage—each trial does but cost a penny, and I am rich enough to afford that at present,’ and he walked home again, not hopefully as on Friday, but cheerfully enough. He had first been too sanguine, next too depressed, but now was attaining the medium which he had already learnt to attain in most other matters.

He walked home little thinking what was passing at the Hall.

Sophy had come into the library punctually at half-past two, brisk and blithe as ever. ‘ Why, Robert, haven’t you got the things ready ? What has Alston been about ? Shall I ring ?’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon, Sophy ; I did not know it was so late. Yes, please ring—we oughtn’t to lose time ; I don’t know what I’ve been about.’

Sophy brought forward table, drawing, &c., so quickly, that prompt as Alston was in answering the bell, his work had been nearly done for him before he arrived.

‘You see I had got into a horrible mess,’ began Robert, when they were comfortably settled and alone again.

‘Yes, you must give it over to me ; I must tone down that fiery tree a little. There, do you think that’s better?’ No answer. ‘And that sunset is rather too fiery, too—too much burnt sienna about it. Shall you mind my trying to mitigate it?’

‘Oh, no.’

Sophy worked on with a brisk, certain hand, every now and then asking a question or making a remark, too busy to notice that Robert seldom answered, or if he did so, answered abstractedly. At last she said, ‘There, I must not touch it more, or it won’t be yours. But do, Robert, put in that bit of distance next—almost pure French blue, it will be such a relief.’ And she moved the sketch-book to the purposely-constructed table, and placed the flap over her brother’s knees.

‘Oh, thank you, that’s much better. French what did you say? I tell you what, Sophy—I want to speak to you.’

‘Yes?’ said Sophy, inquiringly.

‘Johnnie was up here this morning, you know.’

‘Oh, yes ; he stayed to luncheon.’

‘Oh, of course! I forgot. Well, Hector was

full of this going to Eltham, and, do you know, I think Johnnie would like, of all things, to go too.'

'Would he? How pleased Hector would be.'

'Yes; but what do you think he says he is to be?—Hector says he *did* wish to be a soldier, but that I know nothing about—a clerk, or whatever it is, in Mr. Rogers' office.

'Johnnie! In Mr. Rogers' office!' repeated Sophy, consternated.

'Yes; he said that was what Mr. Arnold meant to do with him.'

'What a shame!' cried Sophy, energetically; 'such a dear, good-looking, clever little fellow as he is. I always thought he was such a favourite at home, he would be sure to be put in the way of something great. I've always fancied him either Admiral of the White or Archbishop of Canterbury, I really believe; I felt so sure he would get on. What can Mr. Arnold be thinking about?'

'I'm sure it is not that he does not appreciate Johnnie,' said Robert. 'I tell you what I believe it is—he can't afford to do better for him, or else—it only struck me whilst you were at luncheon—why does he keep Frank and Johnnie at home, when he has always been at papa for not sending Hector and Harry to school?'

'Can it be that? Why, I thought every clergyman had enough to send his boys to school.'

'I tell you what, Sophy; I don't think we rich people know what the want of money is—are not much better than the French princess, who, on hearing the people were starving, said—rather more

politely, I believe—‘What fools they were not to eat bread and cheese.’

‘Oh, but——’ began Sophy.

‘What?’

‘Why, I have wondered sometimes, but thought Mr. Arnold must keep John and Frank at home because he was so clever a man he thought no one could teach them as well. But I may have been wrong.’

‘I am sure you have. Do you know, it makes me hate it all—all this eating, and drinking, and riding, and shooting, and heaps of servants and governesses. What have we done to deserve it? And Robert’s voice grew loud and firm, and his eyes bright.

‘But, Robert,’ said Sophy, thoughtfully, ‘you know it is ordered that some should be richer than others. We are told, the poor shall never cease out of the land.’

‘Yes ; but why?’

‘That the rich may help them, I suppose.’

‘And do we? I don’t mean blanket-giving and soup-giving, and sending ten pounds to the Irish and twenty to the Otaheitans, or anything of that. I tell you, we all forget those who need it most—gentlemen like ourselves, who have not enough to live on.’

‘Oh, but, Robert, they would not take it.’

‘You think not?’ And Robert lay back thoughtfully and quietly again. ‘Sophy,’ he said, at last, ‘you have knocked my idea on the head ; but I must tell you, and see if you can’t think better of it. Here am I with money I don’t know what to

do with, which it only makes me peevish and angry to have to spend so differently from any other young man. I was wondering whether—whether somehow I could not send Johnnie to school on it.'

'Oh, Robert!'

'You think it couldn't be managed without hurting and annoying them? I tell you what I'll do, Sophy—send Mr. Arnold a hundred pound note, and put in the envelope, 'An act of simple justice.' Then he will only think it some of his old debts come in—that one of his old college pupils had thought better of it, and paid his bill at last.'

'Ah, but that would not be true, Robert,' said unromantic, truth-loving Sophy.

'A good deal of it would. It would be but an act of simple justice—we rich, he poor; we idle and selfish, he hard-working and never sparing himself.'

'But he would not like it, I am sure.'

'Sophy, you said just now the poor shall never cease out of the land. Now I tell you, we are told it is more blessed to give than to receive. Now, how angry Mr. Arnold would be if the poor here were too proud to take his broth or coals. Well, that's just what I should be if he didn't take my offer. He would have no right to deprive me of the blessing and comfort of at length doing some good with my money.'

'But, Robert, you don't possess a hundred pounds.'

'No; but my father would give it me if I asked him, and I could pinch it out of next year. How I've got through all I have this last year, Heaven knows; and yet he would give me twice as much

next year, if I asked him, squandered and wasted as every penny of this has been.'

'No, Robert, not that; think of the bracelet you gave Netta, the twenty pounds you sent to that poor East-end advertisement, all you give the children, and——'

'Yes; people who don't want it.'

'But you can't say you've spent it on yourself.'

'Well, Sophy,' he cried, crossly, after a moment's pause, 'I wonder why you are so dead against it.'

'Dead against it? am I? No, I did not mean to be. Anything to save Johnnie from Mr. Rogers' office. Yes, as you say, it can only be because he cannot afford to do better for him. Oh, how sorry I am!'

'So am I, and most because papa ought to have thought of it and done it long ago. Mr. Arnold could not have hesitated then.'

'Could *he* propose it now?'

'Ah, perhaps so—and yet, Sophy, I should like so to do it. It would be such a comfort to me. I should just have fifty pounds to dress upon and buy birthday presents—don't you think I could manage? and the scraping and saving would be much better fun than squandering my money about, keeping no accounts, and coming to papa for another twenty pounds whenever I want it.'

Sophy looked at him with her soft, earnest, thoughtful gaze. 'Robert, I believe you are right—I don't think Mr. Arnold could refuse—I mean, he is too good. He might feel very sorry and very much hurt to be forced to take it; and yet he would

be too good to deprive you of the blessing of giving at some cost to yourself.'

'Ah, you see, the hundred pounds sent as I proposed would save all risk of mortification and obligation. Think what a resource Johnnie has always been to me, and he is my cousin. Nonsense ; Mr. Arnold may be too polite to tell me so, but what he must really think is, why did we not think of it years ago ?' .

'How glad I shall be, Robert, if you can manage it.'

'I *will* manage it, Sophy,' said Robert, quietly. And what did he tell me only the other day?—that, helpless as I am, I still had responsibilities ; and I am sure the chief is, to take care I don't *waste* all the money that I don't spend selfishly. It's about the only 'talent' I have to use.'

Sophy did not answer, but after two or three minutes' pause, said, 'It is all but the half-hour, I must be going ;' and bending over his sofa and kissing him, 'Dear Robert, I am so glad you thought and mean to do it, only—will you mind not quite doing it all, letting me try to give one five pounds? I think you are quite right ; we do overlook those we are far more bound to help than even the poor people.' And so she left him.



CHAPTER XIII.

VAIN REGRETS.

From grief exempt, I never had dreamt
Of such a world of woe.

* * * *

Of the hearts that hourly break,
Of the tears that hourly fall,
Of the many, many troubles of life
That grieve this earthly ball—
Disease and hunger, and pain and want,
But now I dreamt of them all.

* * * *

The wounds I might have healed,
The human sorrow and smart!
And yet it never was in my soul
To play so ill a part.
But evil is wrought by want of thought
As well as want of heart!

Hood.

ROBERT, left to himself, lay back in thought, and not till the first shade of twilight came across him remembered his sketch again. It was too late to do anything to it now ; besides, Sophy had not left many instructions behind her, and so he lay back once more.

Sophy ran into the library in the evening, before going to the drawing-room, looking quite a pretty girl in her low, pale blue merino, a bright pink in her cheek from the haste she had made.

‘Robert, I have been so wanting to get to you

again ; I cannot think how it was I kept throwing cold water on your plan this afternoon—because you would keep trying to make yourself out such a selfish wretch, I believe. I do hope my arguments have not been influencing you all this time I have been away.’

Robert smiled quietly. ‘Why, no,’ he began slowly——

‘Only don’t lose any time. But how can you do it ? Shall I write a note for you to Mr. Arnold, and ask him to come and see you, or will you——’

‘Well, Sophy, do you know, it’s all done ; I have been bold enough to act for myself ; I have written to Mr. Arnold proposing it, thinking that if he did not like it, he could refuse by writing, and there would be an end of the matter ; no word need ever pass about it between us.’

‘Oh, yes ; how much better than asking him to come. How much better a man’s head is than a woman’s.’

‘Only one thing I have not done, Sophy—said anything about you. I thought two joining made it disagreeable, and I have plenty.’

‘Oh,’ said Sophy, her bonnie face falling.

‘I was afraid you would be sorry. Of course, I don’t mean disagreeable to myself, but perhaps to Mr. Arnold. I am sorry you are vexed.’

‘Oh, never mind. Yes, I see what you mean. Oh, I do wonder what he will answer ! Robert, do let me see the note as soon as you can, if it comes when I am in lessons.’

‘Yes, I will. I’ll send in a slip of paper, ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ whenever it may be. Oh, Sophy, I feel so im-

patient! just like Hector before a day's shooting, I should think. Really, after all, life has some pleasure and excitement for me, I believe.'

However, no answer came that evening, nor the next morning, but about half-past twelve the library door was thrown open and Mr. Arnold shown in.

Netta, however, had just come to read, and, though she laid down her book very willingly, did not offer to go; and then came Sir Hector and made the Vicar promise to stay luncheon, and sat down to talk till luncheon itself came, until Robert was so fretted as to grow perfectly silent and cross, and more sullen than he had allowed himself to be since Mr. Arnold's conversation with him a week ago.

At last one o'clock came, and the whole party left him, but he had only just finished his own dinner when there was a knock and Mr. Arnold entered.

'I have said good-bye to the others, because I must be home by half-past two, and wanted to have a few minutes alone with you, Robert, to thank you for your kind note.'

'Oh, sir!'

'I do thank you most heartily, my dear boy; but——'

'Oh, you wont refuse me such a comfort,' interrupted Robert, eagerly, his eyes fixed almost as wistfully and piteously as a child's upon the Vicar's face.

'No, no—at least, I have no wish to do so—only, from what you say, I don't think you have spoken to your father about it, and I could not allow you to spend so much of your allowance on a son of mine without his knowledge and approval.'

'Oh, Mr. Arnold, you don't know how generous

he is to me. I am ashamed to tell you how much I have run through this very last year, but he has never enquired how I have spent a farthing of it, and if I were to ask him for twenty pounds this minute, would give it me without a moment's hesitation.

'Yes, I know how generous Sir Hector is, but indeed I cannot accept your offer otherwise.'

'Oh, Mr. Arnold, I did not want any one to know—I don't want any fuss or parade. I thought here I could deny myself a little quietly without any one knowing, except Sophy ; she is like myself, I could not help asking her.'

'I do not want any one told but Sir Hector ; he would keep your secret.'

Robert was silent a minute. 'Then I am right ; Johnnie would like it ?' he said.

'How much *you* can little tell,' answered Mr. Arnold, walking to the window ; 'for a whole year his heart was set on it, and then, when I found the determination to be a soldier did not, as I had hoped, die out, I was obliged to treat my poor boy as a man, and tell him how I was circumstanced, and that it could never be.'

'But surely, sir, you did not tell him he was to go to Mr. Rogers ?'

'Not then ; I then had no opening at all for him in view. But, a few months later, I happened to take him to Worcester with me, and Mr. Rogers saw him and was so pleased with him that he told me if ever I thought of the law for him, there was no one he would like better to take into his office.'

He is a kind old man at heart, rough as is his exterior.'

Robert almost groaned. To think how all this time they themselves have been rolling with selfish, good-natured, thoughtless ease in every superfluity of life.

'Johnnie heard him say so then ?'

'Yes, and my half acceptance. We have never said a word more about it, but I was afraid my poor boy took it very much to heart.'

'Oh, Mr. Arnold, what selfish, heartless brutes you must have thought us all this time, and I lying here with nothing to do but think !'

'Well, to begin at seventeen to think of others to such good purpose is more than most men do. I am afraid I never should have done so in your place.'

'But you really wish me to tell my father ?'

'I must indeed make it a condition.'

'I am very sorry.'

'So am I, for a reason perhaps you will not guess ; but indeed it must be so.'

'Could you wait now, sir, if I asked him to come in at once ?'

'Yes, if you would rather it should be so ; or you might send me a line down in the evening.'

'Oh, no ; I want it all settled. Might I ask you then to see if papa's in his study, and if so, ask him to come here one minute ?'

Mr. Arnold complied, found Sir Hector, who went across to his son rather uneasily. 'Arnold means to be all that is kind to that boy,' he thought ; 'but I do think he's a little hard on him. Poor fellow !

what's the good of making him as tender-conscienced as my good little Sophy there ?

‘ Oh, papa, thank you,’ said Robert, not looking particularly as if any apology or confession were coming. ‘ You know you nominally allow me a hundred and fifty a year—a great deal more than I ever want—no wonder you smile, when I generally ask for so much more ; but I don’t mean to do so any more ; I mean to make the hundred and fifty do.’

‘ Oh ! so Mr. Arnold has been lecturing you on extravagance ?’

‘ Oh dear no,’ answered Robert, eagerly ; ‘ but I have grown heartily ashamed of it myself.’

‘ Oh, nonsense ; I wont let you get such fancies into your head. Why, if you were up and about, I’ve no doubt you would be costing me, one way or another, four times as much as you do now.’

‘ But you see I am not up and about, and so a hundred and fifty is a great deal more than I want for clothes and nonsense. I mean to make fifty do next year. You don’t believe me, father. Well, I can hardly tell without trying ; but I mean to try, and with your Christmas present, I’m sure I shall manage.’

‘ Well—but what’s the great object of saving a hundred a year ? You don’t want to grow into a miser, I hope ?’

‘ Oh no, father ; it was very stupid of me not to speak out at once, only I hate it so. But, Mr. Arnold will have me tell you.’

‘ Come, I wont have it going to ragged schools and reformatories, and all that modern cant.’

‘No, simply this. Johnnie Arnold has set his heart on the army even more than Hector, and actually Mr. Arnold had been obliged to let him know he must go into Mr. Rogers’ office instead, because he could not afford it. And, papa, *I* can afford it, so I am going to do it.’

‘Did Johnnie ask you?’ said Sir Hector, rather slowly.

‘Oh dear no; but it struck me that he looked very down-hearted all the time Hector was talking so eagerly about going to Eltham, before luncheon yesterday, and when Hector *would* know what he was going to be if not a soldier, I thought going into Mr. Rogers’ office came out with a great gulp, and then he turned it off by talking to me.’

Sir Hector made no answer.

‘I spoke to Sophy about it yesterday, and she was against it at first, but soon quite came round, and feels what I do, that we rich people are the most heartless, selfish, dull-seeing——’ Robert stopped, the flash suddenly dying from his eyes.

‘Well, and why did you tell *me*?’

‘Because, though I wrote yesterday about it, Mr. Arnold says he cannot let me use so much of my allowance upon a son of his without your knowledge and approval.’

‘That he may shame me with my own selfishness,’ said Sir Hector, bitterly.

‘Oh no, father; but you don’t really think it? Ah, I see now what made Mr. Arnold say he was as sorry to make me tell as I could be to tell. But you know that was not why he would have me speak out.’

‘Yes, I do know it, or if I didn’t I should be less worthy than ever to have such a man for my friend,’ said Sir Hector, dejectedly.

‘Then, papa, may I do it?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you wont tell any one?’

‘No.’

‘Papa, I have managed badly somehow,’ said Robert, sadly.

‘Only shamed your father,’ answered Sir Hector, shortly. ‘Most people do that; so he ought to be accustomed to it by this time, frank, kind-hearted man as he thinks himself.’

‘Oh, papa, how can you! If you weren’t so very kind to me, I could never even have thought of this great pleasure. It seems worth living for, worth lying here, to save that dear little fellow from a country attorney’s office. Perhaps if I had not lain here I should not have thought of it.’

The first time Robert had ever recognised the slightest mercy in his lot. Sir Hector stood with averted face, biting his lip fiercely a minute or two, then turning round, said, quietly—

‘You may tell Mr. Arnold that your plan has my fullest sanction, and that I do not ask you to let me take it off your hands, simply because I have no right so easily to rid myself of the burden of selfishness and shame you’ve laid on me.’

‘Oh, father, don’t talk so; I will never say such untruths: and if you had asked me to give it up, indeed I couldn’t; my life would seem all a useless blank again, and the sooner I died the better, as it used to do. Only, papa, you will promise me

if I should die before it is done, you will keep it up.'

'I do promise it ; and I tell you what, my boy, wise as you are, you've forgotten the commission and regimentals, and various other expenses ; and mind, those, when the time comes, you must let me bear.'

'Thank you,' answered Robert, as heartily as he could ; not so very heartily after all, for he *had* thought of them, and that they were beyond his present means, but that his majority would then be near, and he would be able to manage somehow. However, he loved and understood his father too well to claim Johnnie's whole launch into life as his own rightful pleasure. He was much less selfish at heart than even Mr. Arnold gave him credit for.

'Then, father, will you tell Mr. Arnold you have no objection ? He said he wanted to be home before half-past two.'

Sir Hector crossed over his spacious, oak-floored hall to the study, where he had left and now found his old tutor. It was a moment of awkwardness neither ever forgot.

'Oh, I am sorry you referred Robert to me,' the Squire began, trying to assume his usual frank, careless tone. 'What objection could I find, so much as we owe to you, so fond as we all are of Johnnie ? You will like to see Mr. Smith's letter ; there it is. Thirty boys, you see. How delighted Hector will be !'

'Thank you. May I take the note home ? My

wife will like to see it. If Hector will be delighted, what will my own boy be ! Robert can never know half the relief, the comfort——’ The Vicar stopped short.

‘Go on,’ said Sir Hector, laying his head on his hands ; ‘go on. Shame me more ! I deserve it all !’

‘Oh, Hector, how can you take it so ?’

‘You know you did stop short simply because you were too generous to heap more hot coals upon my head.’

‘Nonsense—nonsense. I stopped short because I was afraid you might take my pleasure to be such, I allow. But you know, Hector, you always had a way of perverting my words and twisting them from their right meaning, so I have learnt to be wary.’

‘You have, indeed ! Why did you not tell me my duty ? How could you let me run on with such an insolent parade of wealth and hypocritical parade of affection, the other night ! To pride myself upon remembering to send the carriage for your wife, and to have left you with this burden and trial all these years !’

‘If a man chooses to run the risk of marrying on four hundred a year, he must expect some trials and burdens ; and Hector, don’t forget that you gave me the means of marrying at all, Aggesden itself ;—and I have had some trials, I don’t deny ; but, Hector, lots are balanced more nearly than you think. If I have many cares and anxieties which never come near the wealthy, I do think I have also pleasures which are scarcely ever theirs.

How my little Mabel pets me!—my Johnnie loves me! So don't make yourself so very unhappy; Johnnie's future was my greatest trial, one to which I was finding it very hard to submit; but see now all at once it is removed. There is more truth in that triumphant 'The Lord will provide,' than his own ministers have often faith to see.'

Sir Hector made no answer.

'I should like just to go across to Robert for a minute, so I ought to say good-bye here, I am afraid. If I am unpunctual to half-past two, my boys will be as triumphant as *you* used to be when you caught me out years ago. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' answered Sir Hector, submitting listlessly to Mr. Arnold's warm grasp. 'You know there's one comfort—there will be regimentals, &c. coming on in time, and those I have made Robert promise shall be my care.'

'Thank you very much,' said the Vicar, too kind-hearted to add, what he still hoped, that perhaps some way or another, by the time such expenses must be incurred, he himself might be a freer man, and need incur no further obligation.

Yes, he was a good man, but not perfect. Oh! why could he not with his own strong right arm find bread and provision for his children? Why must he accept their provision in part from a boy who could never earn a penny, nor would ever think of doing so in his whole life?

But as he walked home again, the answer came, partly in Robert's words, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' and all could not always claim the higher blessing, partly that it was God's will in this

case that his late hope, as every other such, had come to nought, and His mercy that now made his literary disappointment sink into comparative insignificance, only comparative after all. If by his pen he himself could set Frank fairly forth in life, what happiness and pleasure would it still win him !

CHAPTER XIV.

JOY!

Hope on, hope ever ! though to-day be dark,
 The sweet sunburst may smile on thee to-morrow ;
 Though thou art lonely, there's an Eye will mark
 Thy loneliness, and guerdon all thy sorrow !
 Hope on, hope ever.

GERALD MASSEY.

MR. ARNOLD reached his study by a quarter to two, only by very brisk walking ; but, oh ! what a comfort a brisk walk, whether obligatory or voluntary, is ! cares, vexations, and mortifications, irritability, vanity, and depression, flee before it, and so, by the time the Vicar need face his boys, his heart and brow were light again, the rebellious, sturdy independence of his nature all but allayed, and the first sight of his home, and the remembrance of the happiness that the mortification of his pride would bring his wife and son, chased it away for ever.

Frank and Johnnie were waiting for him, and the three-quarters of an hour passed pleasantly, for both had prepared their lesson well. And as soon as it was over, the Vicar pushed away the books, and told John if he were not in a great hurry to be off, he wanted to speak to him.

‘ Oh, yes, father, only——’

‘ What ?’

‘ We were——but it doesn't signify if you want me.’

‘Well, I do want you ; but I shall not keep you many minutes—and it is good news, Johnnie. My boy,’ laying his hand on John’s shoulder, and looking full into his up-turned, half-frightened, half-expectant face, ‘thank God, we need never think again of Mr. Rogers’ office for you.’

‘Oh, papa!’ cried the boy, with more of a sob than a smile, such a heavy burden these few words had lifted from his buoyant, aspiring nature.

‘Yes, a very kind friend—I am not to tell the name, Johnnie, so you will never ask, nor guess, nor spread suspicions—wishes to undertake the charge of preparing you for the profession for which you have always longed—the army. I am not wrong in feeling you still desire it as much as ever?’

‘Oh, no, papa!’

‘Well, then, my boy, your heart’s desire is fulfilled. And now I must thank you for the patience and cheerfulness with which, after the first few days, you bore a prospect so distasteful to a boy of any spirit or ambition.’

‘Oh, papa! I knew——’

‘That it was as distasteful to myself as my son? It was, indeed, Johnnie; still, as you have borne adversity—it was adversity for a boy—so well, I hope you will meet prosperity equally bravely. School will be a new life, have unknown trials; you are a home boy, and will get well bullied and fagged, and misunderstood, I daresay,’ said the Vicar, smiling to hide his emotion.

‘That will all be preparation, papa.’

‘Yes, and very good for you. In the battle of life, as that of Worcester, right must learn to bear

being beaten. There, I have not kept you many minutes. Only you are not a soldier yet, Johnnie, so one kiss, my boy.'

Oh! how tight the lad's arms were thrown round the Vicar's neck. Could any mother's and daughter's clasp have been more true, more tender? Do you despise such conduct in father and son? Let those laugh who win.

'There, now go and tell your mother.'

'Papa, you would like——'

'No, no, my boy. I want to get out into the parish, and it is your news.'

'Papa,' said Johnnie, hesitatingly.

'Yes.'

'Will you say, 'God bless you?''

'God bless and protect my boy for ever, for the sake of that Son who Himself knows the trials of youth and boyhood,' said the Vicar, earnestly, and so went out.

Johnnie stood still a few minutes. It was all so strange and new; could it really be true?—then dashed across the hall to the dining-room to find his mother, whom, after all, he met on the stairs.

'Oh, mother, mother!' he cried, joyfully, 'what do you think? I am going to be a soldier after all!'

'You are? Who says so?'

'Papa; some one has offered to do it for him. Mamma, only think!' and Johnnie threw back his head, and assumed a military air to the best of his power, 'how I will fight for Old England and you!'

'Why, Johnnie,' smoothing back the curly yellow

hair, and kissing the fair smooth forehead, with trembling fingers and misty eyes, 'you are like old Mrs. Blogg, who said she was sure if there was a war she always prayed it might be a *civil* one.'

'No, mamma, I don't mean that ; but I do wish I was old enough to go and fight those Russians ! That's the only thing. I must wait so long to be a man.'

'But you will enjoy the school-life meanwhile.'

'Oh, so much ! Mamma, are you not pleased ?'

'Anything that pleases my boy pleases me ; and anything to keep you out of Mr. Rogers' office !'

'Oh, mamma, don't talk of that again !'

'I am sure I never wish to do so, Johnnie. I can't think what made papa ever think of it seriously. However, he will never think of it again now.'

'No ; and, mamma, he is as glad as I am. Mother,' and he suddenly laid his fair young head upon her shoulder, 'I will make you so proud of me !'

'I am sure you will. Well, dear Johnnie, I do congratulate you ! I know you will get on. Does Mary know ?'

'No.'

'Then run and tell her. She, poor child, will be more delighted than anybody. I must come with you. I should like to see her pale face brighten, dear child.'

'John ran off to the schoolroom, burst in without waiting for an answer to his hasty knock, and cried eagerly—

'Mary, I must tell you, I'm going into the army after all.'

‘What! Johnnie?’ asked Mary, looking up with almost breathless eagerness from her exercise.

‘I am to be a soldier after all! Only think! Hurrah!’

‘Oh, Johnnie, I am so glad, so very glad,’ said poor Mary, with bright eyes and broken voice.

‘Why, Mary dear!—so am I. Just think of me in a red coat and a sword by my side; Robert, wont you envy me?’

‘You wont be killed, then, like Sir John Moore?’ asked Robert, upon whom Anna’s repetition of Wolfe’s *Burial* of this officer had made a deep impression.

‘No—at least I hope not; or, if I am, that I shall have won as good a name. I beg your pardon, Miss Storey,’ with a little blush of embarrassment and shame, now first remembering the governess; ‘but I could not help coming—mamma gave me leave to come and tell.’

‘I am so glad you did,’ said Bridget, simply; ‘you must let me congratulate you, too,’ and she held out her hand, which the boy shook warmly, and then went away to think over and take in, if he could, this sudden realization of his brightest dreams, and to do this he retreated to the study.

Here Frank, after waiting a quarter of an hour for his walking companion, came to seek him, having looked in vain elsewhere.

‘Why, Johnnie, you don’t mean *you’re* in trouble?’ asked the boy, incredulously, seeing John thoughtful and grave on the window-seat, his own usual resort in such case.

‘Oh no! only so glad. Frank, do you know I’m

not to go to Mr. Rogers? I am going into the army after all.'

'You are?'

'Yes; some one is going to pay for it; but I'm not to ask who. Oh, Frank, I can't believe it; it seems too good to be true.'

Now, since he had left the house, another thought had arisen to mar the Vicar's pleasure at this unexpected opening for his boy,—a fear that, constituted as Frank's temper was, he might regard John's happiness with an evil eye, might with some justice feel aggrieved that whilst his younger brother was so well provided for, he himself was left as little so as ever; that his jealousy of John's priority in the affections and favour of all about them might now, alas! burst into a flame never to be extinguished. It was a far more bitter drop in the cup of happiness than his own mortified independence had ever been, which, indeed, was as nothing by the side of such an evil as such jealousy between two brothers.

But he was even yet too hard on Frank, and did him injustice. He might be proud, self-willed, ungracious, and cold-mannered outwardly; very easy to offend and aggrieve, very hard to appease or win, but he was not so bad-hearted as, alas! he had made his own father think him. So now his first thought was not of himself, nor of any slight put on himself, nor of favour shown to his brother; his eyes brightened, and he said, heartily,

'Hurrah! I always did think it was a horrid shame they ever should think of Mr. Rogers' office for you. Well, that is a comfort,' and he seized

Johnnie's hand and shook it heartily, 'and here's another, you won't be so down-hearted about Hector Merivale now, and be up to a little fun again.'

'What you never guessed—'

'I should think I was deaf and blind if I didn't,' retorted Frank at once. 'Well, now then, come on, or we shall never get home by tea-time and then I shall get rowed, and I'm trying for fun to see if I can get through one week without ;' and the two brothers started arm-in-arm, talking eagerly, and thus the Vicar saw them from a cottage window, and his heart rejoiced within him.

It was then Johnnie discovered how very little he had in his eagerness learned,—nothing but the bare fact that some one was going to take upon himself his preparation for the army. But to whom he was to go to be prepared, or for what branch of the service he was to be prepared, he knew no more than Frank, who, in consequence, thought him the stupidest fellow on earth, and did not at all scruple to tell him so ; but such open speaking did not damp the spirits or happiness of either, and both boys raced into Massing, bought the gunpowder Frank wanted, and raced back again within the two hours. They came in then, happy and breathless, to the dining-room, by the fire of which Mr. and Mrs. Arnold were sitting, and, after detailing their rapid proceedings, asked eagerly all the particulars that John had neglected to learn from his father a few hours earlier. Frank asked quite as eagerly as Johnnie, and Mr. Arnold gave up an idea, the advisability of which had at one time seemed great,—that of telling Frank that John's launch into life being taken

off his shoulders, he should consider that of his eldest son his own special charge. He would not cease so to consider it, but he would not speak of any such determination to Frank. His father's should not be the hand to give any opening for the inlet of jealousy.

The next morning there were three letters for the Vicar and—his MS. He put it by with a brave smile, and, just glancing at the second printed refusal, burnt it, pitying the poor worried editor or reader for simply having had to date it, and then opened the first of his other letters which came to hand, which was as follows :—

' Market Rayston, Hereford.

' DEAR SIR,—In all probability you have forgotten me even by name, for it's ten years now since I left Worcester ; but if not, may have noticed in the papers the appointment of David Kelme, Fellow of Trinity, to the mastership of Market Rayston Grammar School ; perhaps even, as the salary is good and a fixed one, have thought the old curate of St. Agatha's a very lucky fellow. No such thing ! the school is in a detestable condition in every way, possessing fifty scholars indeed, but of these barely fifteen are gentlemen, and an under-bred second master of whom *I* cannot get rid.

' You will at least own all this is candid, when I tell you my object in writing is to ask if you cannot send me a gentlemanly boy or two to cheer me up a bit, and help raise the character of the school ? The foundation of good old Sir Adam for the free education of thirty of the natives of Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucester is full now, but of

course there will be vacancies in time, and there are also three foundations of £50 a-year each to Queen's, Oxford. It would be a real charity if yourself or any of your clerical neighbours could and would send me three or four gentlemanly boys at the bare cost of board and books.

‘But enough of this grumbling. At any rate this mastership has taken me from the clodhoppers of Bucks and enabled me to marry a dear little woman named Janet Kirkby, who waited five years for me without fading or souring. I don't think those weary years agreed so well with her husband, or else five-and-thirty snobs are enough to make any man mad and irascible. I know I am often both.

‘Kind regards to Mrs. Arnold and all the wishes of the season to yourself. Where is that little yellow-haired fellow you always spoilt so atrociously? Could not you spare him to me for a year or two to be licked into shape?

‘Yours sincerely,

‘D. KELME.’

The Vicar sometimes smiled, oftener sighed as he read. ‘Ah, if I could but send Frank,’ he almost groaned, ‘what might not school do for him? Kelme may be rather irascible. I dare say he is,—he always was a little too sharp and sarcastic on his fellow-creatures even at Worcester,—but he is a good clever man, would work a school well, and a few years of school discipline and companionship would do Frank a world of good. Well, never mind!—Now, what does William say?’

Mr. William Arnold's letter ran as follows :—

'Arundel Villa, Clapham.

'DEAR FRANK,—I don't know how it is we never seem to meet now and know so little of each other's families. The fault lies with our homes being so far apart ; nowhere else I believe. I suppose your children must be growing up ; mine are, I find, for I am writing to announce a piece of family news. Mary Louisa is engaged to young Hawkins, of the firm of Hawkins, Brett, and Co., good old house, and a capital match ; but the young people must wait, and seem so happy in waiting I think early marriage would have cut their serene courtship rather unpleasantly short. Honestly, I think my Mary will not become Mrs. Charles Hawkins till quite the end of next year, when the young man (all I could wish) will be five-and-twenty, and herself little more than nineteen, so you see they can afford to wait. But writing to tell you all this, reminds me very disagreeably how neither do I know your family nor you mine. The first evil I hope you will help me to mend. Let your eldest boy Francis (?) come up and spend his holidays with my Willie, see a little life and become acquainted with all his unknown cousins. My wife desires her compliments to Mrs. Francis Arnold, and joins heartily in my request. I think the lads are about the same age. Willie is thirteen ; four daughters before ever a son, you may remember, but now I can complain as little of lack of one as the other, having now five of each. Ah, Frank ! I should have been a rich man long ago but for all these ties to mediocrity.

‘Little hats, little shoes for the dear little pets,
Are rather expensive when purchased in sets.’

Don’t you agree with me? Still, thank God means always grow with needs, and we can do a good deal more than keep the wolf from the door. Mary is grown quite a pretty girl since the days you knew her, and sings as sweetly as my poor sister Ellen; you must come to the wedding and see her—no, come and marry her, that will be far better. This is about the longest letter I have ever written in my life, so you will excuse my saying I am heartily tired of it, if you are not, and signing myself without further ado,

‘Your affectionate cousin,

‘W. G. ARNOLD.’

‘Ah, he shall go,’ said the Vicar, resolutely, as he refolded the letter with a smile; ‘he will see London before Johnnie, yet. An expensive journey—terrible—but I will manage it. Ah, why didn’t ‘Our Margaret’ bring the wherewithal this morning; but—never mind, two blessings promise to be mine which, when I first sent her on her travels, I scarcely ever hoped to see. Frank has *owned* a fault and certainly for four whole days tried more or less to please me, and my dear John is saved from Mr. Rogers’ office! Well, my pen has no hand in working either blessing, but they are mine without it: so there ‘Our Margaret’ may lie and rest in peace for a season. Who knows but she may serve me in some stead yet?’

CHAPTER XV.

A STORM.

Amid the rushes green and slight,
 Beneath the willows tall and strong,
 Wave after wave, so fast and bright,
 The river runs along.

And every virtue, every crime,
 Our thoughts, our deeds, our feelings cast
 A shadow on the stream of time
 As it goes rushing past.

'Twas good or bad, 'twas right or wrong ;
 And He who notes our every deed
 Has caught it as it swept along,
 And marked it for its meed.

Moral Songs.

CHRISTMAS was drawing very near, near enough for Mrs. Arnold to say to Bridget, when one afternoon they were alone together for a few minutes,

‘We are wondering, Miss Storey, whether you would wish to go home for the holidays or stay with us?’

Words which awoke a great longing to go home in the breast of the young governess, but she had already decided that prudence strongly advised the contrary course ; the journey to and fro was so costly it would take away by far too large a proportion of her quarter’s earnings.

‘Thank you ; I almost think, if I shall not be in the way, I had rather,—should prefer staying.’

‘Well, we were thinking it would be the best for us both, unless you particularly wished otherwise. We much prefer the children’s holiday being short now and longer in proportion in the summer, which will be more enjoyable spare time to you as well as to them, I hope.’

‘Thank you,’ answered Bridget, but with something of a choking in her throat as she thought of Laurel-terrace, and John without his sister on Christmas Day. And then how John must be grown.

‘I think perhaps after all you had rather go home,’ said Mrs. Arnold, kindly, ‘and we are in no hurry. Think it over, and if you prefer deciding otherwise, do ; only I am afraid we could not spare longer than till the Monday fortnight after Christmas Day.’

‘Thank you,’ repeated Bridget, ‘but indeed I need not keep you in any uncertainty. I am quite sure, having left home so lately, I ought not to go home now.’

‘Well, *I* am very glad you think so. The children are so much improved since you came, and you have them in such good order, I am sure Mr. Arnold and myself would feel equally sorry to see the routine into which you have trained them so soon interrupted. I must tell you, Miss Storey, how perfectly,—how more than satisfied we both are with your whole system.’

Bridget’s cheek glowed, and after this kind com-

pliment she found it much more easy to face the thought of her first Christmas away from home.

Christmas Day this year, 1854, fell on a Monday, and the holidays were to begin on Thursday, the two last days being always busily spent in decorating the church and house. Frank left home on this Thursday morning in high spirits for town, so determined he should enjoy himself, that there was very little doubt of his actually doing so.

Anna begged very hard for a half holiday that they might put the decorations in training for the next day, but as Mary said at once two whole days were always enough for all they had to do, Bridget would give the little girl no permission to carry such a request to her mother ; only as Anna looked terribly disappointed and a little cross, offered to begin the afternoon school hours directly after dinner, and as soon as the proper lessons were well done to let both sisters go.

Bridget laid great emphasis on the 'well,' for Anna's attention and heart in her lessons were at all times small, and in the review Bridget had last night been taking of the past three months, seemed to have grown less, or at least to give so little improvement in outward fruit or will, that the young governess could not help fearing her early partiality for the little girl had made her put up with far less pains and attention than she ought to have done.

'Anna, take care,' she said more than once in the first half hour of this afternoon ; 'I am sure you are writing a great deal too fast. Remember, I said *well* done, and I cannot take such a careless exercise as yesterday's again.'

Meanwhile Mary was practising with her own characteristic extreme carefulness, repeating most perseveringly every difficult and intricate passage, and yet playing even such repetitions with so much taste and feeling that the whole effect of her practising was soothing rather than irritating. Certainly Mary's repeats were a much nearer approach to sweet sounds than the scratch of Anna's pen or Caroline's plaintive '*je suis, tu sommes,*' &c.

'Anna, indeed you must not scribble on in that way,' said Bridget again.

Anna wriggled impatiently, and after one moment resumed so near an approach to her former speed, any difference between the past and present was in reality a distinction, not a difference.

Bridget left Caroline to recover from her aggravation of misery on learning *tu sommes* was not 'thou art,' and went and looked over Anna's shoulder.

'Oh, Anna, that is very bad,' as she caught sight of an array of erasures and blots ; 'how much more have you to do ?'

'Only those three lines.'

'Now listen ; you know I have warned you again and again, and if you do not write those last three lines as well as you can, I must indeed have the exercise written out properly from beginning to end.'

Anna shrugged away her shoulder from under Bridget's gentle hand, and answered shortly—

'You said I might go when it was done.'

'When it was 'well' done,' said Bridget, quietly, and returned to poor Carry, who, having discovered

'tu es' was what was required from her, was now quite happy again, and was in five minutes dismissed. By this time Anna had laid down her pen, and was awaiting Bridget's attention with more evident impatience than was at all polite.

'Now then, Anna, let me see.'

Anna brought forward her book, not without some shame, now the time was come.

'Well, Anna, I am very sorry for you, but indeed the exercise is so carelessly prepared in every way I have no choice left. You had better turn over to a new page and begin quite afresh.'

Anna did not even offer to take the book, her brow clouded over, her eyes flashed, and surprised as Bridget was, she could not help being struck most of all by the sudden likeness which flashed out in both to Frank.

'The sooner you begin, Anna, the sooner you can go,' said Bridget, quietly laying the book down; and, turning to Mary, whose practising was nearly over, gave her attention to the piece she was practising playing.

'That is very nice indeed, Mary,' said the governess warmly, when the andante was ended; 'I do not think even Mrs. Arnold could play it with more finish.'

Mary's pale face lighted a minute, but she put by her music without a further word than the 'Thank you' with which she always acknowledged any special lesson from her governess. Bridget in many ways liked Mary more and more as time went on, but the girl's character was still something of a riddle to her, in reality too reserved and proud.

for a nature so kindly and homely as Bridget's own to comprehend it readily.

Turning round again, Bridget found Anna standing where she had left her.

'Why, Anna, what do you want? your pen mended? Why did you not tell me?'

'No,' answered Anna, sturdily, 'but you said I might go when it was done.'

'Anna, that is the truth, but not the whole truth,' answered the governess a little indignantly; 'I did not think you would have repeated it.'

'I wont do it, I wont do it,' repeated Anna, bursting into vehement sobs; 'I will *never* do it again.'

Bridget was thoroughly startled and alarmed by such a childish outburst of passion, whilst Mary said sternly, 'Anna, how can you behave so? She often used to do so with Miss Marshall,' seeing Bridget's consternation; and then took up her work and went out of the room.

Bridget took up her own embroidery and worked on quietly some five minutes, knowing nothing better to do, and hoping time at least would stop those fierce rebellious tears; but no, at the end of the five minutes the sobs were as loud and heavy as ever.

'Anna, you must not be so childish, you will hurt yourself,' said Miss Storey then, with quiet determination. Happily for herself, although from her quietness and docility she passed for a meek-spirited little individual with the world, there was a spirit within her which rose equal to most emergencies.

‘Go away ! I wont—I tell you I wont.’

‘Well, Anna, if I do go away, it will be quite determined that you do write that exercise, and write it properly, before you go on to the next.’

‘And I tell you I will never write it,’ said Anna, stopping her tears one minute to confront her antagonist with those steady, sturdy brown eyes of hers.

‘Anna, you will have to do it ; and it is a great pity to repeat so often what you must sooner or later prove false by your own deeds. Why not make an effort now ? write it at once, and you will be free to go to your decorating before dark, even now,’ ended Bridget, in the quiet conciliatory tone which had already warded off one or two such storms, little as she knew it.

‘I have told you I will not !’ said Anna, sullenly.

‘Words very much to your shame,’ answered Bridget, resolutely ; ‘for your own father and mother have placed your lessons in my hands, so you are disobeying them, not only myself.’

‘Go away, go away !’ cried Anna, stamping her foot passionately.

‘No, I shall not go away just yet ; but wait, hoping your good sense and right feeling will come back again.’

Bridget took her seat at the window—her back to the stormy wrath she had so innocently excited. Anna flung herself down on the floor, and cried and cried, till, in spite of Mary’s parting consolation, Bridget was seriously alarmed. Perhaps, if she had seen Frank’s passion of tears a fortnight before, she would have learnt that it was thus such

volcanic tempers must find vent before nature could replace their thunder-clouds with even outward serenity.

‘Really,’ thought the poor little governess, much distressed, ‘I cannot let this go on. The child will be positively exhausted and ill. Where did I make the mistake? how can I rectify it? But I must not give in; if I once let an outburst like this overwhelm me, my influence, good or evil, is over for ever.’

She waited a few minutes more, then the fierce sobs still continuing, rose, and said quietly, ‘Anna, get up; I really cannot allow such childish, improper behaviour any longer.’

‘I wont.’

‘Anna, you must;’ and Bridget raised the child with such unwavering determination, that Anna, to her own surprise, suffered herself to be drawn up, as a passive log, indeed, but without any unseemly struggle.

‘And now, dear Anna, do use your good sense, and do what you know you ought to do, write your exercise at once.’

‘I wont.’

‘Oh, Anna, I am sorry you can be such a self-willed, naughty girl.’

Bridget’s tone showed her sorrow was a reality; but Anna, determined not to be moved, only repeated her stupid and wearisome ‘I wont,’ and burst into a fresh torrent of crying sobs.

‘Anna, I must stop this,’ said Bridget, changing her tone. ‘Now, listen, I am very sorry to say it, but I am quite in earnest. I shall leave you for a

quarter of an hour ; but if you greet me with another burst of such tears, I must ask Mrs. Arnold to take you off my hands ;' and so Bridget left her old favourite, and in the hall was caught by Carry, a stream of gathers, behind her, which Robert had just torn out, and which she begged Bridget so piteously to mend, that she might get out to Thomas's bonfire again, that a heart of stone could not have refused, much less such a heart as Bridget's. But the rent was so extensive, that the business of repairing it was but just concluded, when the governess' quarter of an hour was over.

She felt thoroughly committed, and most anxious that the threat of calling in Mrs. Arnold would have proved sufficient, for she had never hitherto brought any schoolroom trouble before either master or mistress, sharp as had been one or two struggles she had had before now with little Robert. Imagine her dismay to find Anna as vehemently tearful as ever ; but she said, bravely, ' I am sorry, Anna, you leave me no choice,' and went in search of Mrs. Arnold, who was in the dining-room, so easily found.

' I am very sorry to trouble you, ma'am,' began the governess, colouring and hesitating ; ' but Anna has been crying so fiercely, for more than half an hour, because I returned her exercise, that I was obliged at last to tell her I must ask you to be so good as to—take the responsibility off me.'

' Anna ?—in one of her old bursts of temper ? How excessively provoking. Indeed, Miss Storey, if you cannot control it, I am sure I could do

nothing with her. I never could. But I will ask Mr. Arnold.'

'Oh, indeed, ma'am,' said Bridget, quite appalled at the thought of the Vicar being called into her schoolroom; 'I could not think of disturbing Mr. Arnold. I will try again.'

'Indeed, you are too patient and kind with her. No one can do anything with Anna but her father, when she lets her temper get the better of her in this way. Where she and Frank get their tempers from, I cannot think! But I will come and see;' and Mrs. Arnold followed Bridget to the schoolroom.

If, however, Anna had ceased outward signs of temper in Bridget's absence—and Bridget could not but think she must have done so, if only to rest herself—her entrance was the signal for a fresh outbreak, which Mrs. Arnold's gentle remonstrating, 'Anna, how can you be childish? Anna, I wonder you are not quite ashamed of yourself,' seemed only to increase. Mrs. Arnold speedily slipped away, and Bridget, thus deserted, felt very sorry she had rejected Mr. Arnold's aid so immediately, till she heard his step approaching, and then felt all her first sorrow, vexation, and consternation.

However, there was decided comfort in the very resoluteness of his tread, even in the sternness with which he laid his hand upon Anna's shoulder and asked what all this meant.

'I wont do it!' repeated Anna, in exactly the same tone she had used now for nearly an hour.

'What is it, Miss Storey? Speak out; tell me

all, if you please.' And so Bridget was forced to give a very circumstantial account of the miserable occurrences of the afternoon.

'Thank you. It is a very sad story, Anna, but I hope you will show your sense of Miss Storey's kindness and forbearance by begging her pardon at once, and doing as she told you.'

'I wont!' said Anna again, but in a much moderated key, and beginning to look ashamed and miserable.

'Well, then, I cannot let either her patience or gentleness be longer abused. You have had full time to think better of the whole business, and do your duty, so I can have no more dallying. I ask you for the last time, will you do the exercise?'

'No,' muttered sullenly.

'Then, Anna, go upstairs to bed this minute. Good-night,' and Mr. Arnold was gone, but was obeyed, whatever Bridget might be.

A few minutes later the Vicar met Miss Storey in the hall.

'I am afraid,' he said, with rather a sad smile, 'you must feel disappointed with the result of my interference ; but indeed, with Frank and Anna I cannot say a thing *shall* be done the minute I order it. They are so obstinate, so determined, really so stupified by their own violence, when once they have said they will not do the question in dispute, that I can only punish the disobedience to-day and insist upon the performance of the duty to-morrow.'

'Oh, sir, I am only so sorry you were troubled at all.'

'I am very sorry there was any need ; but in-

deed, you were only too forbearing ; I am very sorry I could not insist on instant obedience. I have once or twice fought out such a struggle with Frank, to show him I *am* master, and master when I choose ; but at a cost *you* would not wish me to incur, I am sure. And Anna is really a very good girl, and by to-morrow will be quite miserable enough as it is at having behaved so shamefully before her ‘dear Miss Storey.’

‘Oh, sir, you are so kind,’ said Bridget, after the long struggle almost tearful herself.

‘Because I am so grateful for your unwearied patience with your difficult charges—so grateful for never having been called in before. Remember, it was Mrs. Arnold brought me now, not yourself, so the spell is not broken, and I hope never will be ;’ and he left her with a kindly smile.



CHAPTER XVI.

REPENTANCE.

And ah ! to him what tenfold woe,
 Who hides so well his sin,
 Through earth he seems a saint to go,
 Yet dies impure within.

Pray we our Lord one pang to send
 Of deep remorseful fear
 For every smile of partial friend—
 Praise be our penance here !

Lyra Innocentium.

AFTER tea, Mr. Arnold meeting Mary on the stairs, inquired after Anna. ‘She has been asleep, papa,’ answered Mary, a little contemptuously ; ‘but now she wanted me to ask you whether she might get up just to do her exercise.’

This was very different from anything Frank would have said, and indeed here lay the great difference between the brother and sister. Anna’s passion once gone, she was penitent and humble at once and most eager to atone for the fault, whatever it might have been ; whilst Frank’s storms ordinarily left very heavy clouds behind them and very little penitence, if any.

‘No, I cannot allow it,’ answered Mr. Arnold, ‘now,’ which answer Mary faithfully reported, and thought over with some complacency as a few minutes later she sat with neat hair, neat dress, and skilful fingers stitching a wristband for one of

Johnnie's future Eltham shirts. She had never incurred papa's displeasure—no, she could not remember his once ever having found serious fault with her, much less having punished her ; whilst here was Anna, at eleven and a-half, so great a baby as to be sent to bed in disgrace. On the whole, the contrast pleased poor Mary : Anna's misbehaviour, her own propriety, marked their standings so well—Anna nothing but a great child, herself almost a woman. She forgot what distress their father's answer had occasioned her little warm-hearted sister, and never pictured the silent, miserable tears dropping one by one on poor Anna's pillow.

'You must be tired of that work, Mary,' said Mr. Arnold, after an hour's perfect silence, Frank and Anna away, Johnnie reading, Robert and Carry at tactics ; 'go and give us a little music.'

Mary complied willingly. Bridget felt quite nervously anxious that her pupil should do full justice to her recent persevering efforts and progress ; but she need not have feared. No such nervousness as would have been her own in similar case assailed Mary Arnold ; she sat down quietly and played through the andante for which Bridget had commended her in the afternoon with quite as much steadiness as with only her governess and sister for audience, and even more taste and finish.

'Why, Mary, how you have improved ! I am sure you do great credit to Miss Storey,' said the Vicar, heartily.

'Mary has taken so very much pains with herself,' answered Bridget.

'So you mean to equal mamma, after all, Molly.

Well, give us something else ;' and Mary played on for the next half-hour.

Then the little ones went to bed, and the music over, Mary returned to the table, but instead of resuming her wristband, produced out of a paper packet the pasteboard letters of the last year's decorations, and quietly looked through them to discover what letters were wanting ; for somehow, no one quite knows how, such sets never are preserved quite entire from year to year. This, and cutting out fresh ones, and a game of chess with Johnnie, took up the time till nine, and then she went upstairs to bed herself, to find Anna asleep again.

The next morning, before Bridget was quite ready to go down, but was standing at the window hastily mending the torn braid of the gown, there was a knock at her door, and Anna entered, copybook in hand, and very tearful-eyed.

Bridget turned to her full of pity, but at the very first word the little girl flung her arms round her governess's neck, sobbing, 'I am so sorry, so very sorry.'

'Don't think anything more of it, dear,' answered Bridget gently, 'and don't cry any more,' afraid her sobs would once more master her ; 'let me see your exercise—it looks very neatly written.'

Anna stood by gulping down her tears as she best could, whilst Bridget corrected her unusually neat handiwork. 'Very good, indeed, dear Anna,' said the governess, kissing the poor child as she returned the copybook, afraid of saying more, seeing how slight a dam was the resolution which was keeping back the culprit's tears. 'Now I wonder if you can

stay and help me with my braid? I have just caught it on the fender and torn off a longer piece than I can mend by myself before breakfast, I'm afraid.'

'I will fetch my thimble in a minute,' said Anna; and away she flew, returning with it in a marvelously short time, and set to work with such goodwill, that her half was finished two whole minutes before Miss Storey's own. The prayer-bell rang as Bridget was finishing off her thread, and so governess and pupil ran down together.

The breakfast passed off much more quietly and orderly than usual, Frank away and Anna silent and sad, scarcely raising her eyes from her plate. Poor Bridget felt more sorry than she could tell that such should be the beginning of the holiday to which the child had looked forward with such eager delight, hoping, however, the pleasures and busyness of the decoration preparations would soon drive such unusual melancholy away.

But the Vicar had steeled himself to act a very stern part, not, indeed, without much consideration and a long struggle in his own mind. Anna was now (as Mary had thought the night before,) no longer a mere child in years, and could no longer be held so little responsible as she had hitherto been for such unruly outbursts as that of yesterday. She must be taught to recognise their gravity, to set her own self to work to stay and check them. So after breakfast, the Vicar called the little girl into his study.

'Oh, papa,' cried Anna, quite relieved to be at last alone with her father, 'I am so very sorry. I

have told Miss Storey, and done my exercise ; you will forgive me now ? though you would not last night.'

'Quite forgive you, Anna ; but you mistake my refusal then,' answered Mr. Arnold, seriously ; 'you are growing too old now, for me to dare to treat such outbursts of temper as I used to do. I refused to let you do your exercise last night, not because I was still angry with you, or was not pleased at your wishing to do so, but to make you taste now something of the pain to which, if you do not conquer it whilst you can, such temper will in after life expose you. Hitherto, as soon as it was gone out of you, you have been able to repair the evil you have done ; but, my child, as you grow older, you will find this blessing more and more rarely yours—you will find the consequences of your passion or obstinacy far more important, far more lasting ; and will find, too, that instead of being able to repair the effects of either as soon as sorry for it, you will very likely never be able to repair them at all.'

'Oh, papa !' cried Anna, frightened by his gravity.

'Indeed it will be so. We grown-up people may repent our hasty words, or unkind deeds, as much as you do now, Anna, but too often find, repent as we may, we cannot efface the pain they have given, cannot repair the evil they have done, bitterly as we may lament them, earnestly as we may strive to atone for them. And, Anna, it was to teach you something of the misery your temper may hereafter cause you that I refused to allow you to atone for your disobedience last night. In this case, it was

simply your earthly father's will that stood in the way of immediate reparation; alas! as you grow older, my little girl, it will be your heavenly Father's—one that neither I nor you can move one tittle.'

His daughter looked up into his face awed.

'Do you understand me, Anna?'

'I think I do, papa; but—it made me so wretched last night.'

'Poor child! But so has my heavenly Father's not allowing myself to atone for a sharp word or needless harshness often made your father. Still, Anna, I have not done yet. A year ago, as soon as the passion of which you had been guilty was over, you said you were sorry; I let you repair the disobedience or wilfulness of which you had been guilty, and thus the matter ended. But now, Anna, you are old enough to know something, if not all, of the real wickedness of such outbursts, what a shameful thing it is for a little Christian child to let her temper so master her sense of right and wrong as to make her defy those God himself has set over her. And this is the reason, my dear little girl, that I cannot let this misbehaviour pass so readily either from your mind or my own, as I have allowed its predecessors to do. You must learn its sinfulness from its consequences, and so I shall not allow you for this day to take any part in the church decorations. You may take the house off Mary's hands, if you like; but a little girl who only yesterday so broke God's laws is not fit to take such part in His service.'

Anna was too awed, too really repentant, too well

trained in obedience in all reasonable moments, to utter one appealing word against this overthrow of her long-desired, busy happiness. She only answered broken-voiced—

‘Papa, I will try to remember why it is, and—bear it,’ with one bitter sob.

‘Bear it well ; helping mamma, being patient with the little ones, being useful wherever you can, that is all I can expect or even wish. Good-bye, my little girl,’ and he kissed her, a kiss Anna returned from the bottom of her heart ; ‘I must go to the church myself, or others will be waiting for me.’

Anna’s first bearing of it ‘well’ was, poor child, to run away from all sight of evergreen and holly and sit crouched up and wretched in one corner of her room. But the words, ‘helping mamma,’ ‘being useful to others,’ rang in her ears, and she ran downstairs again to try and find heart to fulfil this injunction ; how merciful an one it was she was far too young, or at least too childish, to realize. She little thought what a terrible penalty enforced uselessness would have been. And so Anna spent her morning minding Robert and Mabel, whilst nurse was busy in the kitchen helping cook with Christmas soups and puddings, then in carrying a flannel petticoat to an old woman at the extremity of the village, taking Robert with her to get him out of the way, and would have been rendered quite happy again by such unusual trust and usefulness had not the one subject of the dinner-table consisted necessarily, almost exclusively, of that in which she had been judged unworthy to take part.

Mary stayed at home a quarter of an hour after dinner, sewing with her ready rapid fingers the needful ivy on the most delicate of her emblems, and Anna sat by, watching each stitch with sad, longing eyes—longing how much, those less active-natured can little tell, to join in all the work then going on elsewhere.

‘Aren’t you coming this afternoon?’ asked Mary, quite innocently; indeed thinking Anna was shirking her fair share.

‘No; papa said I was not.’

Mary looked surprised; then the truth struck her. We will not say she looked pleased, but her head rose a little higher over her work, though neither by word nor conscious look would she have done anything to increase Anna’s grief and shame.

The church was but small, and in such expert hands as the Vicar’s, Mary’s, and Johnnie’s, such willing one’s as Bridget’s, wreaths, decorations, and sentences made such rapid advances, that Sir Hector and Antoinette Merivale, when they looked in in the course of the afternoon, to see what was going on, were perfectly astonished to hear that the effect they then saw had been entirely produced since nine that morning.

‘But we came to help,’ said Sir Hector; ‘set me to work, Arnold. Ah, Johnnie! giant as you are, you are not tall enough yet to reach that pillar comfortably; come, give it up to me,’ and Sir Hector’s length and activity of limb were henceforth in constant request.

Antoinette, sitting down on a bench near Mary, who was wreathing a slender wreath of choicest brightest-berried holly for the pillars of the font

began admiring and criticising in a lower tone than usual the work around her, nevertheless, in a freer and more careless manner than her more carefully trained cousin would have liked, had she not been very busy and very much flattered by Antoinette's genuine admiration of the taste and beauty of the I. H. S. under the east window—her own special work, both in design and execution.

‘But where is Anna?’ asked Antoinette, at last. ‘I expected to see her doing everything that no one else could or would; she talked of nothing but the decoration when we met her on Monday afternoon.’

Mr. Arnold was wreathing a column near, and heard the question; he could scarcely tell why, but a somewhat painful feeling made him stop to hear the tone of Mary's answer.

‘She is at home.’

‘Oh! very busy there. What is she about?’

‘Nothing to do with the church.’

‘Why—what? has she grown tired of it?’

‘No; but—she was very naughty yesterday, and papa would not let her come.’

‘Naughty,’ repeated Miss Merivale, gaily; ‘why, I should have thought she was far too old for any naughtiness.’

‘So would any one; but she is such a baby still. You don't know how she can stamp and cry.’

‘No, really? Why, I always thought her such a dear, useful, good little thing.’

‘Oh, she's too childish to be very useful,’ answered Mary, quickly and complacently; then colouring a little, and resuming her wreath, she added, rather

hastily, 'Do you think Sophy will come and help us finish to-morrow?'

'Ah! my poor Mary,' thought the Vicar, as he himself went on with his own work, 'are you sorry that you in secret triumph in your superiority over little Anna? or only sorry that you have let such triumph appear?'

Sir Hector and his daughter stayed till dusk, and then walked home happily arm-in-arm. The younger Arnolds themselves soon left the church, Mary lingering after Bridget and Johnnie to alter a wreath to her final liking, the Vicar waiting for her.

'Well, we have done a good day's work,' he said, slipping his daughter's arm in his as they left the church; 'but I am glad there is a little left for Anna to help us in to-morrow.'

'Oh—' began Mary, as if surprised and not quite pleased, but stopped short and coloured.

'You are rather sorry?'

'Oh, papa!' exclaimed poor Mary, shocked to hear her innermost feelings so unexpectedly laid bare.

'I want to know: give me an honest answer—You would rather not?—Dear Mary, take care that you do not forget Anna's is only 'not your way of sinning.''

'Papa,—what—do—'

'No, dear Mary; you know best. If you are conscience-stricken, you are good and sensible enough to take the warning home and profit by it,—if conscience acquits you, you are good and sensible enough to know how sorry I am to have pained you needlessly and unjustly.'

Mary walked on, her heart full, her eyes dim, injured, sad, rebellious ; how ill can such as Mary Arnold bear the shadow of blame ! From any one else, even her mother, she could only have borne such a warning by meeting it in silence. So now, at first, she met it from her father ; but she loved him so tenderly, he was so dear to her (dearer even than her own approbation), that her young heart soon swelled with sinking sorrow rather than injured self-righteousness. As they reached the garden-gate she withdrew her arm and said, tremulously,

‘ Papa, I do deserve it,—you are quite right.’

‘ And, dear Mary, acknowledged faults are soon cured, and you are quite practical enough to work out the remainder of the cure without another word between us,’ and he entered the house without allowing time for another word at all.

But how often afterwards Mary thought of those few kindly words, that little evening walk.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY.

Within the rich man's lordly halls
 Young footsteps lightly trip,
 And there the sweetest music falls
 From children's rosy lip.

And little arms as fondly meet
 The poor man's neck around,
 As merrily his children's feet
 Along the red tiles sound.

Moral Songs.

CHRISTMAS itself was soon gone by ; but some of its accompanying festivities were still in store for the Arnolds, for on January the sixth, Sir Hector's birthday, it had been the immemorial custom at the Hall to give some kind of ball ; and, as since his return to England after his marriage children came quickly about him, he had for the last ten years exchanged the grown-up guests of former times for boys and girls, called the party 'Netta's' and enjoyed the exchange immensely.

'Ah, Netta,' he said this year, 'now you are a young lady at large, ought we to change this back to people who are 'out' ?'

'Oh dear, no, papa,' answered Miss Merivale at once ; 'the children will be so disappointed, and we could not have one of the Arnolds if we did.'

'Hush ! for fear mamma should hear and immediately decide, that as it has always been your party,

it must be yours still. Never mind, Netta, I tell you what we'll do : have this for the children, and when it's over, you and I will have another on our own particular account.'

'Ah, papa, delightful—the country is a—little dull : can you forgive me ?'

'Yes ; as you never trouble *me* with any complaints or depression of spirits. So you miss all your town admiration, eh, Netta ?'

'Well, I think that must be it ; each day is happy enough as it goes by, only the whole seems rather monotonous.'

'Well, you have some gaieties in store. The Elvery's ball and the county ditto next week will do something to reduce your country roses.'

'And yours, too, papa,' retorted Antoinette, gaily. 'I am sure I only look like your daughter, as I always do.'

'H'm ! I always flattered myself I passed very fairly for your elder brother.'

'No ; a great deal too good to me to be anything but what you are, my dearest, dear old father,' and the spoilt beauty laid her head proudly on his tall, broad shoulder.

Ah, Mr. Arnold, your conclusion as to wealth and affection, however satisfactory for yourself, was, happily for your betters, not quite so true as you thought it !

And so invitations to the children of all the country round were issued for Thursday, January 4th, and amongst others to the Arnolds, where, on Thursday, the 28th, arrived a man on horseback and dropped at the Vicarage a delicate pink en-

velope and the enclosed note on similarly tinted paper—

‘Sir Hector and Lady Agnes Merivale request the pleasure of the Misses Arnold’s company to an evening party on Thursday, January 4th, at half-past six o’clock.

‘Aggesden Hall, Dec. 28th.

‘Dancing.’

A note similarly worded, save in the gender of those invited, was delivered for ‘Mr. John Hector Arnold,’ and then the servant galloped off to carry the like pleasant prospect to all the homes containing children round about.

John, Anna, Carry, and Harry were delighted ; so was Mary at first, but her first pleasure was soon moderated by thoughts and remembrances which the others were too young to remember, or to share in if they had remembered. Within an hour of the arrival of Netta’s note she was upstairs inspecting with a sad discontented face a sorry array of tumbled muslins. Poor child, one or two childish tears dropped down on the unpromising looking heap. She was thus found by her mother.

‘Why, Mary ! already at work ? Well, I did think that for once I should have been beforehand with you. How do they look ?’

Mary looked up and tried to smile and hide the tears that she had suffered the picture of future mortification to bring into her eyes.

‘Oh, wretched ! how discoloured ! and a washed muslin is such an unhappy-looking thing.’

‘The worst is, mamma, they must all be so out-

grown—look at mine,’ and Mary held up her own against herself. ‘Anna might have mine, and Carry hers—’

‘And you?’

‘Stay at home, mamma. I should not mind much,’ answered Mary, knowing by experience how many little miseries and mortifications this children’s ball at the Hall had at various times entailed upon her.

‘Oh, but, Mary, *I* should mind : you have so few pleasures, dear. No ; I have a much better plan ; you shall have a new one.’

‘Oh, mamma, thank you ; but it is not worth while.’

‘Why not ? you do like dancing, dear?’

‘Oh yes, very much when it is once begun, but I have not set my heart on this at all, and a new dress seems so extravagant. I shall never wear it again this winter, and next year it will only be outgrown again.’

‘Oh, with tucks or overskirts we might provide for that emergency. But this was let down to its fullest extremity last year, and now you are so much of a woman you want long skirts.’

Mary was silent a minute. The new dress chased away all her dread of the party, and rendered it as tempting to herself as any other girl of fifteen. Nevertheless, after this silence, she said, cheerfully,

‘No, thank you, dear mamma, don’t think again of a new dress for me. It would cost a great deal by the time it was finished, now I am so tall ; and, mamma, if you have any money to spare, do buy yourself a new bonnet.’

‘Oh no, my dear Mary, not for the world,’ answered Mrs. Arnold, brightly ; ‘what does an old woman like myself want with new bonnets?’

‘Oh, dear mamma, you do ; yours is so wretched, so different from——’

‘Lady Agnes’ ; so are my station and means. I have no wish to compete with her in the least.’

Mrs. Arnold quite meant to speak truly, but if quite truly, why was her tone, generally so soft and sweet, so suddenly hard and bitter ?

‘Oh, but dear mamma——’

‘No ; dear mamma for once will not follow her daughter’s wishes. She does *not* care for a new bonnet, and she does care very much that her daughter should taste a little of the pleasure she had in such plenty herself in her own girlhood.’

‘Indeed——’

‘No, no ; it is quite settled. We will drive over to Worcester to-morrow to buy the dress, and Mrs. Barton shall measure you and make it, then there will be no more trouble about it.’

‘Oh, mamma !’ cried Mary, appalled by such extravagance.

‘What ! you are afraid it will ruin me ? No, not quite that ; and my good useful girl is not always to be thought of last. You may call the dress my Christmas present to you ; it will come out of kind old Lady Merivale’s annual Christmas present to your mother. She has given me five pounds on Christmas Eve ever since I was just your age, Mary.’

‘Oh, mamma ! do spend it this year on yourself,’ cried the girl, eagerly.

‘Part of it I will,—not on a new bonnet, for papa told me only last Sunday he had never liked any half so well as the old brown straw you so despise, and was quite glad to see it come out again; but I will buy a pair of new strings for it, and the rest my Mary and Johnnie shall share between them.’

‘Thank you, dear mother,’ said Mary, heartily, instinct telling her she had resisted the present quite as long as she could dutifully do so.

‘Well, and now for once do not let us get behind-hand with the others; find Anna and Carry, and let us see what can be made out of all this medley for them.’

With Bridget’s help and experience, two very nice-looking and fashionable little frocks were constructed by her own and Mary’s hands, with the exception of the tucks, which Mrs. Arnold undertook, and worked with a beauty and neatness peculiar to those taught not less than a quarter of a century ago. Several successive afternoons the three workers sat in the dining-room plying their needles busily, once or twice catching Johnnie to read to them, but oftener talking desultorily; once in this way, a conversation Bridget afterwards recalled as being one of the very few times she ever heard Mrs. Arnold in any way allude to her youthful life at the Hall.

‘I don’t think I have worked so hard since I left the Hall schoolroom,’ said Mrs. Arnold one afternoon, running her needle in and out swiftly all the while. ‘How wise it was of Lady Merivale to make an hour’s work part of the day’s work. Poor

Emily used to grow very weary, but it suited my dreaminess, as time, not quantity, was required of us. How Antoinette used to rebel about it, but quiet and retiring as dear Lady Merivale always was, she would not give up this ; no, not even when Netta (the Netta of old days) induced Sir John to make quite a fuss about it, and declared teaching young ladies to work was nothing but taking the bread out of the mouth of those who really wanted it.'

'Was your Netta as pretty as ours, mamma?'

'Quite ; and Mary so plain for a Merivale. How strange it seems that beautiful blooming girl should die so young, and Mary be strong and well still, in spite of India and all her cares.'

'But there was another, mamma—Annie ; what was she like?'

'Ah ! a cripple, poor child.'

'Yes, I know that ; but had she a pretty face?'

'Rather ; but dear girl, so odd, bright, and original, no one ever stopped to think of her looks. She was quite the life of the house, young as she died—only fifteen, I think. We used to say the very sound of Annie's crutches brought sunshine with it. Really, Sir John took her loss to heart almost more than Netta's.'

'I thought, mamma, it was Aunt Netta's death that broke his heart.'

'Ah, not that only ; troubles were many just then. You know, my dear, Sir John actually died of low fever ; nothing so romantic as a broken heart. There, now my task is over, and really I find work now as wearisome as Netta used, and cannot do another stitch to-day.'

The 4th of January arrived at last, though very 'lang-a-coming' to more than the young Arnolds. At a quarter-past six, all were ready and waiting in the dining-room for the Hall carriage, which on this occasion was always sent for the little Vicarage cousins.

Bridget was to go with them, Mr. and, perhaps, Mrs. Arnold, meaning to follow later, and the young governess, in spite of the newness and neatness of her own high white muslin, felt rather abashed at her homely appearance by the side of the little Arnolds, who did such full justice to their full skirts, tight-fitting silk stockings, and slender shoes. All this nicety seemed not a little inconsistent with their usual careless, untidy appearance, but it was on such an occasion as a party at the Hall that all Mrs. Arnold's old associations of delicacy, refinement, and good breeding revived strongly enough within her to arouse her to make every exertion to give her children, as far as was possible, all the advantages of dress which had once been so lavishly expended on herself.

Mary, especially, looked her very best : willing, and to a considerable extent, skilful, as had been Bridget's aid, the professional dressmaker had given an air to Mary's simple double-skirted muslin which those of her younger sisters possessed only in part. She looked to Bridget like a forced lily—tall, graceful, and refined, but overgrown, and too pale-faced for beauty ; still no one could look at her as she was now without thinking—'What a lady-like, nice-looking girl,' at the least.

The carriage came true to the half-hour, but though the mile and a-half was rapidly traversed, the Arnolds were not the first comers : it was well

known Sir Hector liked punctuality, that the time named was the time meant, and that dancing began punctually to a minute at the hour. The ball-room was a pretty sight, as Bridget and her young charges entered it : the pillars of the gallery twined with evergreens and paper flowers ; the gallery itself, where the band was already taking their seats, a blaze of light and holly, in the red berries of which was conspicuous, stretching from one end to the other, 'A happy new year to all.' The hearth was full of blazing logs, the oak boards glittered in the light like glass, and grouped round the fire stood the host, the finest man in the county ; his wife passably pretty, with her pale, delicate skin and black velvet dress ; Netta, more lovely and charming than ever in her floating white tulle and holly wreath ; and a crowd of young Merivales, Elverys, and Marchmonts, all the guests as yet arrived.

There was no restraint nor awkwardness, Sir Hector and Antoinette managing to entertain all so well that the clock striking seven and the band changing their discordant tuning into a quadrille, took all by surprise. Partners for the most part were quickly chosen, and Miss Merivale took great pains to introduce, set at ease, and make dance, the shy stragglers left looking at one another when most sets were formed. Sir Hector made Hector head the first quadrille with little Lady Alice Marchmont, himself taking a very inconspicuous position with the grown-up Lady Alice, her aunt. The party was the children's, not theirs, and he never would have them put out of the first consideration on account of the elders who escorted

them, and this resolution was so well known as to have become a matter of course long ago.

Antoinette glancing round when she thought all her part was at last done, caught sight of Bridget Storey sitting in a corner. True, Mr. Hughes was talking to her, he having brought a sister and brother-in-law; but Miss Merivale knew Mr. Hughes did not dance. Was there no gentleman left? Yes, her cousin, the Honourable Gilbert Duthoyte, a boy of eighteen, who was talking to his aunt, feeling himself rather too old for this kind of thing.

‘Gilbert, I want you; let me introduce you to a partner.’

‘Oh, indeed, Netta, I do not wish to dance.’

‘But we home people do not do to-night what we wish, but what is wanted. So you must come,’ said Netta, impatiently.

‘You must dance the next dance with me, then,’ said the Honourable Gilbert, who admired his imperious cousin not a little.

‘Nonsense, Gilbert, I am engaged ten deep already;’ and by this time Bridget’s corner was reached.

‘Miss Storey, allow me,—my cousin, Mr. Duthoyte.’

Mr. Duthoyte bowed, asked for the honour of Miss Storey’s hand, and was much mollified by finding his brother, the Earl, in want of a *vis-à-vis* for himself and Antoinette.

But Netta could not look after all so thoroughly again, and Bridget went through some of the mortification and weariness of sitting down dance after dance. But it is a great thing to make a good

start ; and the flitting dresses of the children, the merry sounds of the music, the brightness and novelty of the scene, afforded quite as much entertainment as an accidental guest like herself could expect.

Supper was announced at half-past nine, and such an elegant, brilliant scene as the supper-room, was another new sight to the London clerk's little daughter. Happy voices rang merrily on all sides, and loudest, merriest of all, Sir Hector's—the gayest of the gay, kindest of the kind.

After supper, dancing was speedily resumed ; but Miss Merivale having now a little leisure, remembered the Vicarage governess once more, and, taking her into the drawing-room, introduced her to kind old Mrs. Elvery, with whom the next half-hour passed very pleasantly over the volumes of beautiful prints with which the table was strewn, whilst Netta ran away herself to fulfil an old promise of dancing the first 'Lancers,' after supper, with Johnnie Arnold.

Robert during supper had had his chair wheeled from the library, where hitherto Sophy or Alston had been reading to him, to the far end of the ball-room, and now half-lay, half-sate watching the merry scene happily enough, Mr. Arnold standing by him and telling him who his unknown little neighbours were.

'Well, Netta,' said the Vicar, as Miss Merivale came up to Robert's side to beg him to observe the 'pretty innocent flirtation' going on between Frank Elvery and Emily Bridgman, 'so you are not worn out yet?'

'Oh no! don't they seem happy? I wish I

could stay with you this dance, but'—and as she spoke Lord Duthoyte came up and claimed her hand. Their place was near the Vicar and her brother, and both watched their animated talk and Netta's graceful movements as one of the prettiest sights in the room.

It did not, however, escape the Vicar's observation, that every now and then Netta's face grew half-shy, half-thoughtful, whilst her cousin's tone became more grave and earnest than quite suited the trifling conversation around them.

He watched the two cousins with a bright, keen glance ; then, meeting Robert's eye, smiled and said frankly—

'Is that another pretty innocent flirtation ?'

'Don't ask me,' answered Robert, with an answering smile ; 'I assure you I am no more in their secrets than little Emma there.'

'Well, if we're right, Robert, he will be a happy man.'

'He will, indeed.'

'Into what a sweet, brilliant woman she is growing ! Dear Netta ; who can believe she is the pale little thing in long white petticoats whose christening dinner I remember so well ?'

But at that moment Sir Hector came up to see how Robert was going on, and the conversation dropped.

Two hours later, and a hundred and fifty little boys and girls were sleeping, rosy-cheeked and tired-footed, after one of the pleasantest evenings of their whole year.

And Bridget had made Mrs. Arnold very happy

by repeating the admiration she had casually heard of Mary.

‘Who is that nice lady-like looking girl?’

‘Which?’

‘That tall, graceful girl, with the pale, sensible face and pretty brown hair, talking to young Hector Merivale.’

‘Indeed I don’t know. One of the Merivales themselves I should think; they seem on such easy terms, and she has the dawning of that distinguished Merivale air, worthy to be the younger sister of Miss Merivale herself; how lovely she is looking to-night’——and here the conversation branched off to those with whom Bridget was less concerned.



CHAPTER XVIII.

PARISH WORK.

She was a phantom of delight,
 When first she gleamed upon my sight :
 A lovely apparition sent
 To be a moment's ornament ;
 Her eyes as stars of twilight fair ;
 Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair ;
 But all things else about her drawn
 From May-time's brightest, loveliest dawn ;
 A dancing shape, an image gay,
 To haunt, to startle, and waylay.

WORDSWORTH.

THE rest of the winter passed by quietly. Frank came home at the end of a three weeks' visit, delighted with most of what he had seen and heard, and these were many and much. A Christmas pantomime, the Crystal Palace, the Zoological Gardens, the view from the top of St. Paul's, and to John's united interest and envy, a review on Woolwich Common. The three weeks' absence from home, and the acting entirely on his own responsibility, had certainly done Frank good, both physical and moral. His views of life and his own standing were enlarged on some points, humbled in others. He had learnt what an atom in the mass of mankind he himself was, what a speck on the face of England such a village as Aggesden, but also that a country family or village is, after all, a fair representative of human life everywhere ; that Londoners have tempers, and troubles,

and disappointments as well as their less acute fellow-countrymen ; that the children at Arundel Villa were quite as great ' bothers ' as at Aggesden Vicarage ; and as for father and mother, why Frank would not have exchanged either of his for Mr. or Mrs. William Arnold for the world.

Mr. Arnold was amused by the vividness of the picture of the Clapham house, which Frank's casual remarks and comparisons soon impressed upon his own mind. He had had no idea hitherto how instinctively correct the conclusions of boyhood are. He never questioned the boy on the interior of his cousin's family, but before long had an image of them before him which he felt sure was correct and true. A kind-hearted, uncertain-tempered father ; a brisk, bustling, kindly mother, ' not quite a lady,' he felt convinced was the meaning of Frank's proud glance of comparison at his own mother, whenever he spoke of Mrs. William Arnold ; the daughters all more or less pretty, and more than ordinarily accomplished, whilst of one (an Ellinor) Frank seemed rather shy of speaking, and only thought ' very pretty.' Of the boys he spoke with much more heartiness. William was a ' brick,' and it was very evident how Frank's heart-desire now was to be a public school-boy like his cousins.

But of this the Vicar could not honestly give his son any hope. John's going to Eltham had entailed so many more expenses than had at first been thought of, that ends would but just meet. Still, when Frank was once detailing eagerly Will Arnold's account of a school fight, he took the opportunity of saying,

‘ Ah, Frank ! I wish you could be knocking about there too ; if ever I am a rich man the first thing I shall do will be to send you off to such a school at once.’

Frank was very glad to hear this, but he was not of a nature to submit so patiently as his brother had done to the dreary prospect of the lasting, irrevocable impossibility of his bright day-dream.

In another week John was gone, and the Vicar, dreary as the house seemed to him without him, felt it was high time it should be so,—that the jealousy he had feared was again beginning to be a possibility. Lessons had recommenced in Miss Storey’s schoolroom a fortnight ago, and the Vicar now began regular hours once more in the study, but soon found most of the pleasure of them had vanished with Johnnie. Frank, having no longer any one with whom to compete or compare progress, soon sank into an idle, indifferent way of doing his studies, and though his father was firm in keeping up a far higher standard of acquaintance with all lessons brought before him than he had required three months ago, he could not infect the boy with the heart and will necessary to make such firmness anything but wearisome both to himself and son. Harry, it is true, gave some life to otherwise a dreary task. He was a bright, quick little fellow of ten, too often in mischief if not in full work, but when he was occupied, doing his part briskly and well ; still, though ready wits and good will combined were a great comfort and refreshment to the Vicar after Frank’s indifference, what wearisome work was it otherwise for a man of his age and

powers to be teaching a boy of ten the rudiments of Latin and arithmetic.

Nevertheless, having now only one elder pupil left him more time in many ways, and Mr. Arnold could now so arrange the boys' lessons as to have done with them himself by mid-day, and this gave him more leisure to think of the wants of his parish than he had been able to command the last year or two, and one of the first things upon which he determined to spend his spare energies was a new school-house.

On Mr. Arnold's induction to his living, the sole provision for the education of the children of his parishioners was contained in a foundation left by Dame Sophia Merivale, the pin-maker's daughter, for the maintenance of 'one honest mann as schooll-mastre and twelve schollars;' the foundation consisting of a cottage as master's residence, containing three rooms, in one of which week-day school had been kept since Mr. Arnold's arrival, before which time day, as well as Sunday-school, had been held in the Church. This change, simple and imperative as it had seemed to the new Vicar himself, had cost him an amount of ill-will and aversion, which even yet he had not entirely lived down. Old Mrs. Davies still firmly believed that, if her boy Tom had been taught his A B C in his village church, as his father and grandfathers before him, he would never have got drunk and enlisted, and well-nigh broken her heart, as he had done only two years ago.

Poor Mrs Davies! The Vicar might smile, and feel as innocent of her son Tom's enlistment as of

his previously far more disreputable career ; but at the root of the disturbance this spontaneous arbitrary act, on his first arrival amongst his people, had occasioned, lay a feeling all must respect, and none more so than Mr. Arnold himself. Therefore, though little liking it on many grounds, he had allowed the *locale* of the Sunday-school to remain unaltered.

The old schoolmaster had likewise, and most naturally, very strongly objected to bringing into his cottage the dirty little urchins, who had always hitherto kept at a very respectful distance from his very threshold. But as there was no other room where the school could be held, old Master Stokes had at last suffered himself to be won over by the new Vicar's adding from his own pocket three pounds to the ten pounds paid by Dame Sophia, as the annual stipend of her poor 'honest schoollmastre.'

In good time old Master Stokes had died at the ripe old age of fourscore and five, sixty-five years of his life having been spent in tuition. Poor old man ! the Vicar's heart groaned within him as he thought of all the wearisome, exasperated, useless hours his old parishioner had in these five-and-sixty years endured, but rejoiced in the chance thus afforded him of doing something to raise the tone and standard of Aggesden education.

He attacked the patron of the living, his old pupil, who had not yet resided at the Hall since Aggesden had become his tutor's settled home. Emily Merivale was still too closely and painfully associated with every room, and lane, and haunt. Mr. Arnold boldly proposed new school-house as

well as new master ; but Sir Hector was at Paris, his wife in full influence, himself disliking rather than otherwise everything connected with the place on whose account his former tutor was making such expensive demands upon his purse. Moreover, Sir Hector had, with Sir John's old-fashioned hospitality, inherited many of Sir John's old-fashioned prejudices, and he objected to the ever-increasing education of the lower orders as much as he objected to anything. So he wrote back rather coolly, and entirely disclaiming any substantial assistance towards a new school-house. 'If you mean to canvass the county, of course my ten pounds must be ready ; but I have no wish myself to see any prettier school-house in the parish than my great-great-grandmother's picturesque old cottage, and with your present mania for fashionable reforms, I suppose the next thing you will ask me to do will be to pull this down.'

Mr. Arnold had no intention of being thus pooh-poohed by his quondam pupil. He wrote back strongly, stated his arguments clearly and resolutely, with no shadow of yielding, defended himself from the charge of a mania for 'fashionable reforms' vigorously, concluding by stating he had no intention of canvassing the county, knowing every parish had just then quite enough to do for itself ; and that as for his niggardly ten pounds, he would not accept any sum so grudgingly offered.

Such a letter aroused Lady Agnes' intense indignation, Sir Hector's ready goodnature. Lady Agnes said, 'how impertinent.' Sir Hector laughed and replied, 'So exactly like Arnold ! Well, now what

can I do to mollify him? I wout be bullied into yielding about Dame Sophia's house, but I must make my peace somehow. Ah! offer to raise the salary of old Stokes' successor, so that Arnold may, poor man! have a schoolmaster at last, who at least does not think it an impossibility that there may be a larger town in the world than Worcester.'

So Sir Hector wrote back one of his careless, kind-hearted, conciliatory letters, saying he was glad Mr. Arnold had on second thoughts relinquished the idea of such an unnecessary extravagance as a school-house, but that in the desire for a man of rather more learning than old Stokes for the new master he, on the whole, rather sympathized, and so should be happy to raise the master's salary from ten to twenty-five pounds. 'But mind, Arnold, if you fling this offer back in my face, I'll never give you another penny for schools, nor church, nor nothing. So, my best of friends, beware!'

Very far was it from the Vicar's thoughts to reject such liberality. But troubles were not yet over: Mr. Arnold soon found any course but that of choosing the son of the late schoolmaster in the place of his deceased father, would bring as much obloquy upon his head as that of changing the local habitation of the school had done. But he determined to face it, hoping in due time to weather it.

'Never heerd such a thing in my life as Roger Stokes not succeeding to his father,' cried Mrs. Davies amongst many others; 'why it's always been in his line! did not old Master Stokes succeed his father? and the old man before him his? We

shall have the Queen turned off her throne next !
'Tis my belief it's a family perkisite.

Poor Mrs. Davies little thought what a severe and truthful sarcasm her words contained, nor had she any opportunity of learning it ; for not only her sentiment, but the words in which she had embodied it, became the by-word of the parish, and on Sunday the senior churchwarden, a churchwarden of fifty years' standing, gravely accused Mr. Arnold of wilfully intending to set aside the known provisions of Dame Sophia's will.

'Indeed ?' said the Vicar, quietly, but respectfully, for Mr. Stubbs was a man of grey hairs, himself scarcely yet in his prime ; 'I may be intending to set them aside, but not 'wilfully,' I assure you. Let us look at the deed at once, and see what the actual words of the bequest are.'

And the document, to Mr. Stubbs' credit, being unlike too many parish documents, forthcoming and at hand, it was found to the mortification of the old farmer and the whole parish that henceforth, neither with malice prepense nor without, could they accuse their reforming Vicar of setting aside a 'family perkisite.'

But at last, to smooth the troubled waters of his parish and to conciliate goodhearted, old-fashioned minds that he was heartily sorry in any way to have offended, a 'family perkisite' Mr. Arnold allowed the half of Dame Sophia's ten pounds and house to continue, conferring on Roger the Fourth, as compensation for the loss of his expected dignity, the nominal superintendence of the Church Sunday-school ; which labour, as the Vicar was always pre-

sent himself, had originally consisted of little more than placing hassocks and books in readiness before school, and away afterwards, and had now for some time been performed by Roger Stokes the Fifth, and to whom, however, Mr. Arnold took good care to give no prospect of succeeding on his father's death to any scholastic office, actual or imaginary.

In the place of Roger Stokes the Fourth, Mr. Arnold had found a young man of the name of Taylor, to take the vacant mastership and raised salary, Taylor himself not being all he could have desired, but a great improvement upon old Master Stokes, not only possessing some general information already, but actuated by so great a desire for more that for the first four years of Taylor's mastership, Mr. Arnold had devoted an hour twice a week, towards assisting his persevering efforts at self-improvement.

But this February, 1855, Taylor himself came to the Vicarage to resign his situation. Not that he had aught of which to complain, indeed by this time quite the contrary, for his quiet, peaceable demeanour and the superior proficiency of those scholars he had entirely made himself, had won him general goodwill and respect through Aggesden long ago. But a brother who some years ago had emigrated to Melbourne, had prospered so well and held out such tempting offers to himself, that after many refusals, he had at last made up his mind to accept them and to join his successful precursor so soon as Mr. Arnold had found a substitute to his liking for the village school. At first the Vicar

was greatly consternated at the idea of losing so efficient a right-hand as Taylor had in many ways become. However, he felt he had no prospect to hold out to him in England that could in any way compete with that which his Australian brother set before him, and so said not a word to dissuade him. But at the end of a week, the Vicar found his feelings were undergoing a thorough change in a new hope that was now springing up within him—that now at last he might obtain both a proper school-house and certificated master. He and Sir Hector stood now on a very different footing from that of fourteen years ago, and though some of his former pupil's old prejudices were, he knew, still in existence he had good hope of outweighing them, at any rate in the case in which he took greatest interest. And so one thoroughly wet afternoon, feeling pretty sure of finding the Squire within doors and willing to welcome any visitor as a distraction, he started for the Hall, a well-matured plan of proceeding already mentally sketched out.

But Sir Hector's prejudices and instinctive dislike to changes were not so easily to be overcome as he had expected. Mr. Arnold was calm and resolute, Sir Hector indifferent and half impertinent; so passed the first hour. Then the Vicar grew impatient and indignant, and called his old pupil 'pig-headed,' whereon the Squire, who was very weary of the whole discussion, grew hot and angry himself, and for full ten minutes ran on in a rapid tirade against the whole system of government education. Mr. Arnold heard him out quietly, and having thus gained a right to his revenge, coolly answered one

after another of Sir Hector's objections, to his own satisfaction, if not his hearer's, and concluded by calling the duty of thus providing for the enlightenment of Aggesden one of the plainest and most imperative duties of his life.

'There, there, Arnold, have done ! I yield,' cried poor pestered Sir Hector, rising, yawning and poking the fire to restore bodily animation. 'Well, now, tell me the sum you want, and I'll give you a cheque for it and have done with the whole matter for ever.'

The Squire very well knew he could have said nothing that would so provoke the Vicar as this profession of indifference to the value of a scheme which had in all seriousness been put before him as an 'imperative duty ;' but he listened very patiently to the sharp lecture on his squirearchal duties which followed, and when it was over both laughed and were perfect good friends again.

'I beg your pardon, Hector,' said the Vicar, a little ashamed of past heat and plain speaking ; 'but if you will be nothing but a big boy again, you must expect me to forget the thirty years that lie now between my Squire and his boyhood, and go back to our old relations.'

'No, I don't,' retorted Sir Hector, good-humouredly, 'nor do you do it, and you know you don't. My crikey (as my boys would say), how you would have boxed my ears five-and-twenty years ago, if I had tried to stop the current of your eloquence then by professing no interest about the matter concerning which you had 'lashed yourself to fury.' Well, now then, to business : I am per-

forming a solemn and imperative duty, forswearing my own conscientious convictions at the bidding of my spiritual adviser. You want a schoolroom and school-house—600*l.* say ; gable ends and porches of course also, so add 200*l.* more for nonsense, oh ! and a flower and kitchen-garden for the dear overpaid, extra-conceited, out-of-his-station-forced master, say 100*l.* more. There, are not you ashamed to cajole a poor man out of 900*l.* on one wet weary afternoon when he has no spirit left to cope with you ?’

‘ But I have no intention of receiving any such sum from one man ; we’ll apply to the Council of Education, and canvass the farmers, and St. John’s, to whom all the parish, that is not yours, belongs. Thank you, but now I want something in the stead of all the money thus saved you.’

‘ Well, what ?’ asked Sir Hector, despairingly.

‘ The ground upon which to build the school—the little bit at Broad Hedge.’

‘ Little bit ! the prettiest bit of the whole estate ! No, that you shall *not* get from me !’ cried Sir Hector, quite energetically.

‘ Well, then, some spot equally central.’

‘ Oh, any you like, anything to get rid of you—at least of the subject. Now, then, let’s turn to something pleasanter, or if your head still runs on business I’ll ring for Netta ; she was meaning to run down to the Vicarage this afternoon, only she has caught cold somehow, and I would not let her go out.’

By this time, Sir Hector’s bell had been answered, and the man sent with a message to Miss Merivale.

‘Poor thing!’ said the Squire, ‘all our visitors are gone now; Duthoyte and his supercilious young brother left yesterday, so we were having a game of billiards together to while away the dreariness when you came. Ah, here she is,’ as Miss Merivale entered and shook hands heartily with the Vicar.

‘I have told Mr. Arnold you have business with him,’ said her father, glancing at her mischievously; ‘but you’ll both excuse my reading the paper whilst your interesting conference goes on.’

Netta glanced at her father half-shyly, half-enquiringly, and coloured a little, *why* Mr. Arnold could not think, and still less so when she opened her business, which proved to be, ‘Did not he think something might be done to improve the church music?’

‘Something? a great deal, I have no doubt,’ answered the Vicar, heartily; ‘we have become tolerably used to it by this time, but it must be very discordant to unused ears. I have no voice myself, nor Wilson, unfortunately, or I should have tried to do something long ago. Of what plan were you thinking?’

‘Oh, no *plan*,’ answered Netta; ‘only—if I could be any use—’ and she hesitated with unusual embarrassment for a Merivale.

‘You would be so,’ said the Vicar, kindly; ‘thank you very much. We must begin with the children, and get them introduced into the choir who are not at all uppish, and do the very best they can, and have always attended to the few suggestions I have made. Well, when will you begin?’

‘Oh, directly; whenever you like. Only you

must, please, quite *set* me to work. Tell me what I am to begin ?

‘Begin at school with trying our boys’ and girls’ voices if you will? What day would suit you best?’

‘Oh, any day; to-morrow, if fine.’

‘And three o’clock? thank you. Then Mary and myself will be there beforehand and put things a little in train. The next thing is, how often you could come down to practise. Twice a week?’

‘There, you see, Netta,’ cried Sir Hector from behind his newspaper, ‘that’s just what I said; Arnold would take you at your word, and nail you to time and hours, regularity and punctuality, dirty children and Gregorians, before the idea had been before him five minutes.’

‘I gave Miss Merivale credit for meaning to be taken at her word, and I do not think I wronged her,’ said the Vicar, courteously.

‘Oh, no; I always like to begin a thing at once; besides, we have only six weeks more here!’ and she sighed—‘only don’t ever call me Miss Merivale again.’

‘No?’ said Sir Hector, pretending to be surprised and puzzled; ‘ah, I see! but, Netta, you mistake. Coming honours don’t cast their shadows before them, only ‘sorrows,’ and even the weight of your future glory is not sufficient to forecast itself. You must be content to be plain Miss——’

‘Papa, you can’t even quote a proverb correctly,’ interrupted Antoinette, trying to smile, but her face crimson.

‘What, Arnold, you don’t understand,’ seeing the

Vicar thoroughly puzzled ; ‘ah ! yes you do,’ as the expression of perplexity changed suddenly into one of amused perception. ‘Well, then, do *your* duty, and congratulate. You silly girl,’ kissing Antoinette’s burning cheek fondly ; ‘what ! are you so ashamed of your choice already ?’

‘Oh, no ; but papa, you shouldn’t’—but Antoinette broke down.

‘Well, then, I must make Mr. Arnold’s assurance doubly sure ; so, Arnold, this girl and Duthoyte are engaged out and out—and more, mean to be married on May 22nd, my girl’s nineteenth birthday. Silly child, not to enjoy her liberty a little longer ; but when she tells me the courtship has already been about these ten years, what can I say ?’

‘No, what indeed ?’ responded the Vicar, kindly. ‘Then, Netta, you must let me congratulate you, and, in right of ‘Auld Lang Syne,’ give you a last kiss, and wish you, from the bottom of my heart, every happiness in your married life.’

‘Oh, thank you,’ said Antoinette, returning the kiss with respectful warmth, and then, poor girl, turning away her face to burst into tears.

‘Why, Netta !’ said her father.

‘It—it—it is only because I am so very happy,’ sobbed Miss Merivale, and ran out of the room.

‘Your congratulations are sincere ?’ asked Sir Hector, drily.

‘Thoroughly. Why not ? What ! are not you satisfied with an earldom—a fine, unembarrassed estate, and the man himself—one earning such a noble name as Lord Duthoyte ?’

‘Oh, *I* am quite. Oh, so an earldom, a fine estate, and promising talents, devoted to the good of one’s poorer fellow-creatures, outweigh a first cousinship. It’s a pity poor Emily Merivale had only the last of these compensations. Who knows but a title or estate might have turned the scale!—’twas but a *second* cousinship in my case, Arnold.’

What could Mr. Arnold say or do? What but silently press the Squire’s hand tight and take his leave? With the Vicar Sir Hector’s marriage had made his first miserably-ended love a subject upon which he could never say one word to him it most concerned.



CHAPTER XIX.

A WEDDING.

I saw her, upon nearer view,
 A spirit, yet a woman too !
 Her household motions light and free,
 And steps of virgin liberty ;
 A countenance in which did meet
 Sweet records, promises as sweet ;
 A creature not too bright and good
 For human nature's daily food ;
 For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
 Praise, blame, woe, kisses, tears and smiles.

WORDSWORTH.

BOTH the Vicar and Miss Merivale kept their appointment punctually the next day. But such work being wholly new to the young girl, and the children being much awed by her, Antoinette found it was a very difficult task to decide who had voices and who had not, and so, after half-an-hour's rather fruitless trouble, the meeting adjourned to the Vicarage, where there was a piano which served both to embolden the children and aid the mistress.

Finally, six boys and six girls were selected, and Antoinette promised to come down every Tuesday and Friday morning to instruct them, nodding a kindly farewell to the twelve half abashed, half delighted children. But by this time it was so nearly dusk, there was nothing for it but for the Vicar to see Antoinette home ; and, indeed, he was nothing loth to take such an office on himself.

Nevertheless, their walk was a quiet one, Antoinette shy and ill at ease, little thinking what a favourite she was with her companion, and looking back herself with ever increasing depression at the past light-hearted frivolity and self-pleasing of her life. Not so Mr. Arnold; he was indeed wondering what had suddenly incited his young friend to make an effort at parish-work, and seem so determined to carry it on perseveringly, so long as Aggesden was her home, but the comparison of Netta's past indifference to such matters with her present exertion, was scarcely drawn to her disadvantage. Antoinette's gaiety and kindliness, even beauty and grace, were natural endowments which would have blinded harsher eyes than the Vicar's to the careless frivolity of the few preceding months of uncontrolled liberty, the remembrance of which was beginning to weigh heavily upon the young girl's own heart.

Very steadily, however, Miss Merivale persisted now in the parochial duty which she had taken upon herself, and Mr. Arnold could not help thinking it was owing to her interest in this work, and a half sad, lingering reluctance to see the last, as an unmarried woman, of a home she loved so dearly as Aggesden, that the Merivales' stay at the Hall was prolonged on and on, till it was not until the Tuesday in Easter-week that the last singing-lesson came.

After it was over, Antoinette gave, with some hurry and glistening eyes, a little present to each of her twelve scholars, and invited them the next day—the last at Aggesden—to tea on the lawn, and then turned to go. Lord Duthoyte was now staying at

the Hall, and had walked down with his cousin ; but, to Mr. Arnold's surprise was not waiting outside to escort her home again. Perhaps Antoinette was afraid he was thought remiss, for she said, softly, ' I asked him not to come. I should like you to walk back with me the last time, if it is not inconvenient.'

' Not the least. Is it too old-fashioned to offer you an arm ? I am afraid you are tired.'

The kind sympathy of the tone of even these few words made Antoinette's tears brim over ; but she drove them back with more of her old impetuosity than had often of late appeared, and answered in as bright a tone as she could command,

' Oh no, not tired, thank you, only—you know—I have Dr. Johnson's authority for saying, ' No one ever does even a *disagreeable* thing for the last time without regret.' '

' And I think latterly your singing-class has not even been disagreeable.'

' Oh, no ! If I could only have gone on with it—rather, had only begun it sooner.'

' You must carry it on where you are going,' said the Vicar, kindly.

' Yes,' she said, with a happy smile, ' there will be plenty of such work at Bury Duthoyte. Lord Duthoyte is so indefatigable amongst his tenantry—has all this winter, when not in town, taught twice a-week in the night-school.'

' I congratulate you,' said the Vicar, simply and heartily.

' Yes, it—it was all *he* did, and yet his thinking of me, that made me long to be of a little use in my

own parish before I left ; and—and I want to tell you before I go, it was your sermon the Sunday afternoon before you came up about the schools, that made me determine not to dream away any more time in mere longing, but to ask you to let me do something at once.'

'May your prompt acceptance of a duty here be an earnest of your whole life,' said the Vicar, warmly.

'Thank you :—you think me sad ; I—I can't help it ; I do love it all so much, and—and *you*. What little good there is in me is all your laying, and—and Lord Duthoyte knows it.' The use of this formal title with the Vicar had entirely arisen since Antoinette's engagement. 'We—if you would allow it—we should so very much like, as a little token of our gratitude——'

'Let me marry you at my own church, then, and so delight the whole parish with their Vicar.'

'What ! would they so much like it ? Would they care ? They know us so little. I—I have never been amongst them as I ought.'

'You had little opportunity, dear Netta, till this last visit ; you forget you were still in the school-room a year ago, and these last few weeks I have heard of you in more than one village home. Besides, all take a pride in you, and would love you as their Squire's eldest daughter, even if they had never seen you at all ; your marriage will be to Aggesden quite as interesting an event as that of the Princess Royal will be to all England.'

'Oh ! Mr. Arnold.'

'I quite mean it. Then you are not going to be married here ?'

‘I—I scarcely know ; mamma only thinks of London, I fancy. I don’t think he has ever—we are—business is to go on to-night, and it will be mentioned, I dare say. But you have not let me say what I was going to say, that if you will allow it, we should like so very much to give the dear old church an organ as—a little remembrance of us when we are gone !’

‘Thank you, dear Netta,’ said the Vicar, pressing her hand.

‘Mary plays so nicely now, I am sure she will be able to play a great deal more than I have been able to teach my poor girls, and I do think she will be able to keep up the singing ; she understands music quite as well as I do.’

‘We mean to try not to let your efforts fall to the ground with your presence, but to follow them up as well as we can ; and when you come here next autumn, as I know you will, prove ourselves as worthy as we can of your husband’s and your own munif—’

‘Oh ! Mr. Arnold, don’t ! I—I do wish he were not such a rich man.’

‘Indeed, Netta, I cannot agree with you there. What a blessing wealth becomes in the keeping of so conscientious a steward as Lord Duthoyte.’

‘Yes,’ answered the young girl, evidently much pleased at this simple commendation, ‘only every responsibility is so increased, and—I don’t think Harry would work himself half so hard if his wealth did not half frighten him.’

‘Netta, I am so glad to hear you say ‘Harry,’’ the Vicar could not help interrupting.

‘Did I?’ said Antoinette, smiling and colouring. ‘I ought not; we mean to keep it for quite home life, only *you* seem like home. I know what you mean, and he feels so too, that no earthly honour ought to thrust the Christian name into such utter disuse as a title does in England; he will always be ‘Harry’ to me,’ and she smiled through the tears which had been fast gathering again.

They walked on the next few minutes in silence, and thus reached the inner gate, where Sir Hector and Lord Duthoyte were sauntering up and down, and joined them. Thus the conversation naturally turned upon indifferent subjects till they reached the house.

‘You will come and dine with us, Arnold,’ said Sir Hector then.

‘Oh no, thank you; I dined hours ago.’

‘Oh! but any one can manage two dinners a day to oblige a friend.’

‘But think of my wife and children waiting tea for me at home. No, I must go, thank you. Good-bye,’ and the Vicar shook hands with Netta and her father, and was preparing to bow to the young Earl, who, however, had no intention of being so ceremoniously treated, and holding out his hand, found it heartily shaken.

‘Come to-morrow then, Arnold.’

‘Oh! but—’ hesitated Mr. Arnold, thinking Sir Hector must have forgotten to-morrow was their last day at Aggesden.

‘Yes, do come,’ said Netta, as if sure this would carry the point, and it did; ‘and ask Mary, Anna, and Carry to come up with the children at three, if

they will, and help us to get them to play. They are to have tea at five, so as all to be home before dark ; so you must give a half holiday and let them come early ; Harry and Bobbie too, if they will ;' and to this Mr. Arnold also assented, and walked home, thinking how often he had needlessly repined and grumbled. 'His work here bare some fruit ;' and now it seemed his words had, by God's blessing, awakened the slumbering good in the gayest, the brightest of all his congregation ; one he had little thought did aught but criticise and smile at the homely plainness of speech with which he had long ago found he could alone make Christian doctrine and duty comprehensible to the unlearned and ignorant people amongst whom his lot was cast.

Early the next morning the Vicar received the following note :—

'DEAR SIR,—You have, I believe, long known that our wedding-day is fixed for May 22nd. We both hope you will be so kind as to marry us at half-past eleven o'clock of that day at Aggesden church. I much wished for marriage by banns ; but finding this not acceptable to my dear (future) wife's (here the Earl had evidently become perplexed, and had added the 'future') family, have, on consideration, thought it not well to persist on the point.

'I am, yours very sincerely,

'DUTHOYTE.'

'Well, here is news,' cried the Vicar, as he laid the note down on the breakfast-table ; 'good news for all Aggesden. Netta is to be married at little

Aggesden church, and who do you think is to marry them ?

‘ Oh, Lady Agnes’ brother, the Dean of Dardley, I suppose,’ said his wife.

‘ What, not you, papa ?’ asked Amabel, as if otherwise she should much doubt the validity of the ceremony.

‘ Yes ; I myself, Mabel. Is not that grand ? Your humble old father make an Earland a London beauty man and wife.’

‘ Zoo not humble, zoo not old,’ protested Amabel, indignantly ; but the news was too interesting and pleasant for any one to have time to attend to her.

The good news spread like wildfire through the village, and the delight was so general, so hearty that even Lady Agnes, who had objected to the transfer of the marriage from London to Aggesden only less than to her daughter’s marriage by banns, was so touched and pleased as to cease to regret that husband, daughter, and bridegroom, all three combining against her, had obliged her to yield a point she had last night thought all-important.

And so on May 22nd Antoinette Merivale was married. The sun rose bright and clear, and was never dimmed by a single cloud, howsoever fleeting, throughout the day. Long before eleven was the churchyard path lined many deep, and the church itself well nigh filled with villagers, come to look their last on their ‘ young lady.’ Many gay, many delicate dresses flitted past them before the bride herself came. But come at last she did, and as Sir Hector handed his daughter out of the carriage and

laid her slight, trembling hand on his arm, there arose a faint but heartfelt cheer, a murmured 'God bless her,' that nearly overcame both father and child. Sir Hector took off his hat and murmured 'thank you ;' whilst Netta raised her soft blue eyes to the rustic ones so kindly in their curiosity, and bowed her head, with a faint smile of gratitude, to all ; a notice, an acknowledgment which won all hearts for ever.

The service was performed as simply as reverently. Fain would the Vicar have administered to the newly-married pair the Body and Blood of Him who, as surely as He had been a guest more than eighteen centuries ago at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, was a guest at this. But Mr. Arnold knew and respected the motives which withheld them—the incongruous character of the wedding party ; for there was no use denying it, the Duthoytes were as a family very worldly, and of the Mr. and Ladies Duthoyte, uncles, aunts, and cousins, the guests mostly consisted. But as Mr. Arnold walked home after the morning service the Sunday following, he did not forget to think of the young Earl and Countess then partaking of the Supper of their Lord at York, for to the English Lakes was the bridegroom taking his young wife.

The village bells struck up a loud and merry peal as the wedding party turned into the vestry, so loud it seemed as if the bells themselves had caught the spirit of the day, and were vying with one another to do it honour. The signing was quickly over, and then the Countess of Duthoyte passed down the church on her husband's arm attended by a long train

of bridesmaids, Sophy and Mary first, the Ladies Anne and Laura Duthoyte next, two little Mannings, daughters of the Indian 'Aunt Mary,' following, and Mary and Anna Arnold bringing up the rear. On nothing had Antoinette so determinately set her heart as that two of her Aggesden cousins should form part of her bridal procession.

'Well, I never!' cried one good old dame after another, as the young pair and their bridesmaids passed. 'Bean't it beautiful? just like the angels of heaven, I'm thinking.'

Antoinette heard and could not resist raising her eyes to her husband's to see if he had heard too; and this little token of domesticity, of feelings such as they themselves knew well, loosed the tongues of the spectators, which the sanctity of the place, the awe of such grandeur, and their own all-intent curiosity also, had hitherto kept dumb, and so loud and hearty a cheer was raised and passed from one to another, that even the head-long merriment of their village chimes grew faint before it.

There is no need to follow the wedding-day further. Nothing can save a wedding breakfast from being a tiresome and wearisome, if not aggravating affair. No beauty of the bride, nor worth of the bridegroom, nor high breeding and intellectuality of the guests, can preserve the speeches of a wedding breakfast from being, at the best, 'stale, flat, and unprofitable,' and this was no exception to the general fatality. Anna rose from the breakfast-table thinking she had never heard such nonsense talked in her life, and being too shy to say so, never

discovered how nearly all the company were of the same opinion.

The after breakfast pursuits were, however, lively and pleasant enough to atone for all past weariness. The wedding pair off themselves, the large remaining party broke up into smaller ones ; some drove over to Malvern, others stayed at home and saw the school children eat their cake and drink their tea, and—at least those who were wise enough—joined in their merry games ; and in the evening came a ball to all the tenantry, farmers and tradespeople about, a scene of mirth, liveliness, and amusement that Anna never forgot.

The next day came the gentry ball ; this arrangement being ‘just like Sir Hector’s usual headstrong indifference to *savoir faire*,’ sighed poor Lady Agnes to her sympathizing sisters.

It was at this ball that Sophy Merivale made her first County appearance after her introduction at Court, and according to promise, went into the library to show herself in evening dress to Robert.

‘Ah, I see,’ she said, good-humouredly, as Robert surveyed her without remark, ‘even Paris finery cannot make me a fit successor to dear Netta—cannot make a Merivale of me ; but do you know, Robert, I think that is all as it should be ; that it would have been quite unfair to the County if mamma had immediately on Netta’s marriage produced another Miss Merivale equally lovely. Now the Miss Elverys will at last get some of the admiration they deserve. I am sure Mrs. Elvery will be quite grateful to me for being so plain.’

Sophy spoke lightly, but certainly Mrs. Elvery did feel something of the sensation so merrily ascribed to her, and many other County mothers did so also ; and long before the ball was over, had this remark and rejoinder been many times made and given—

‘What a plain little thing Sophy Merivale is ; even her lovely, elegant dress does not help her out.’

‘No ; but she is so good-tempered and unaffected, it is quite a pleasure to watch her ; she seems as happy herself, and as bent on making others happy, as if she were the loveliest girl in the room. I believe the charm is, she is never thinking of herself.’

And the speaker was right : so when for the fiftieth time in the course of the next few days it was remarked to Sophy that Lucy Elvery had been quite the belle of the ball—for the fiftieth time, without a shade of jealousy, she answered,—

‘Oh, I am so glad you think so, for I always have admired her so much, and never could make other people to do so to my heart’s content.’



CHAPTER XX.

JOHN AND SUNSHINE.

So, staff in hand, we sallied forth,
 And o'er the uplands clomb our way ;
 Where East and West, and South and North,
 A world of gorgeous beauty lay.

The Breedon's green and grassy steep
 On the left hand the prospect closed,
 And, like a Titaness asleep,
 Huge Malvern on the right reposed.

So fair a scene,—so calm, so bright,
 Might well entrance the outward eye,
 And with contemplative delight
 The inward vision satisfy.

MOULTRIE.

MIDSUMMER seemed to be at hand almost prematurely. Bridget was to go home on the 23rd ; John was expected on the previous Wednesday, and Bridget was very glad she should thus see his welcome home and learn how school life had fared with him. The few days' holiday Mr. Smith allowed at Easter had been spent at Clapham, where Mr. William Arnold had kindly invited a second unknown cousin, but letters between Aggesden and Eltham had been regular and long, and gave no token of any great change in the hitherto home boy.

He arrived now on Wednesday, the 20th, at the end of a lovely summer's day. Mr. and Mrs.

Arnold drove in to fetch him ; Frank, Mary, Anna, Carry and Harry set off on foot to meet them half way : as yet, 'absence' had certainly only made the hearts of the home people 'fonder.'

By tea time the large party were all at home, laughing and talking all together. At tea itself, however, as sometimes happens after so much uncontrolled mirth, a kind of silence fell on all, and Bridget had full leisure and liberty to see what changes six months of school life had made in her first little friend. He was changed, and yet absurdly the same : taller, broader, more manly, and yet smile, voice and manner, fair wavy hair, and open good-looking face, just the same as ever. Still after so long an absence his peculiar frank courtesy, gentlemanliness, even general good looks, struck Bridget more than ever, and she did not wonder that the Vicar's eyes glistened with pride and affection as often—and this was very often—as they rested on his lad.

Then when John's box was unpacked, his sealed report was discovered, and the boy watched his father's face a little anxiously as it was read. But as Mr. Arnold laid it down, he placed his hand with his old confiding gesture on the schoolboy's shoulder, simply saying, 'So you have not belied the promise of your home life, John.'

'Let me see, Frank,' said Mrs. Arnold, taking up the paper, and was far more communicative, reading aloud, 'Classics very good, mathematics good, algebra good, modern languages very good, general information far above par, conduct exemplary,' and adjoined to the N.B., that progress, and no fixed

standard, regulated the filling in of the reports,—‘Mr. Smith cannot allow John Hector Arnold to return home without the expression of his warmest approbation of the diligence with which he has pursued his studies, and the gentlemanly conduct which has distinguished him in and out of school alike.’

‘Oh, Johnnie!’ said his mother, laying his head on her shoulder and wetting his cheek with her tears of delight, as she kissed him.

‘Dear mother, I am so glad, so very glad. I was half afraid,—you see, I had never been with other boys before, and some were so far before me,—in French particularly. Miss Storey, I was going to ask you if you would give me a lesson every day whilst I am at home? I would get on as fast as ever I could.’

‘I am sorry to say, Johnnie, Miss Storey leaves us on Saturday.’ John looked disappointed, and her own pupils sorry, too. Bridget felt sometimes as if her situation were too happy an one to last. ‘But Mary, I dare say, will do her best for you. Modern languages were not much thought of in my days; and but for the French and German tour with Sir Hector, I should not have known one word of French, even when double your age.’

‘Ah, and German too; most of the fellows learn it, and if Mary could help me there, too, it will be easier to catch them up when I go back. Schmidt could not make out my not even knowing the letters; and it would be such a help to know the pronunciation if I can’t the sense.’

‘Well, Mary can help you there, too; but you

must not work either her or yourself too hard during your holidays. And now, if you're not too tired for a walk, Johnnie, walk with me to old Blogg's, will you? He has sent up wishing to see me and—' I grudge the time away from you, the silence conveyed.

'Too tired! Oh, no! only of sitting still in that baking railway carriage;' and in two minutes father and son were off.

Bridget only hoped her own going home would be as delightful, give half as much pleasure, and in her heart of hearts she did not much doubt its doing so.

The next morning rose as clear and lovely as its predecessor, and almost the first sound Bridget heard was John's merry whistle under her window. To-day all were punctual to eight o'clock prayers, and a happier, lighter-hearted party than that which ten minutes later assembled round the homely Vicarage breakfast-table, it would have been hard to find throughout England itself.

'Well, and now what shall we do?' asked the Vicar, as the breakfast-party were preparing to disperse. 'I am sure I can do no work this lovely day; it would be a perfect shame to spend one hour of it on lessons, Miss Storey. What do you say, mamma, to a scramble up Breedon and an impromptu pic-nic?'

'Oh, yes, yes!' cried all but mamma; and mamma's only objection was, 'it will be a *very* impromptu one, I'm afraid, for there is very little besides bread and cheese in the house; but cook shall see what she can scrape together at ten minutes' notice.'

‘Oh, she will find quite enough for reasonable mortals on such a lovely day as this ; fine air and a good scramble instead of pudding, eh, Anna? Yes ; I knew you’d agree. Well, then, at half-past nine, three-quarters of an hour hence, we’ll start, —climbing up the hill will be too hot to be pleasant if we don’t reach it till mid-day.’

All ran off to prepare in their various ways for the expedition, Bridget as delighted as any one, for the little Londoner had as yet seen comparatively little of the surrounding country, and, as the last half-year the school-room lessons had gone on most steadily and uninterruptedly, had never yet been any such expedition at all.

Of course, at half-past nine all were not ready. Mamma it found in the garden busy with Johnnie, hastily gathering a basketful of strawberries. Carry it found ready to cry with despair at her long unsuccessful hunt for her gloves, as papa’s loud ‘now, children,’ sounded up the stairs ; poor Caroline having a vivid remembrance of having on some such occasion been left behind for unpunctuality similarly caused. But Mr. Arnold was in far too high spirits and good humour to teach any lesson, however valuable, in so harsh a manner this morning ; and on hearing his little girl’s piteous ‘Oh, Mary, do help me—where can my gloves be?’ sprang up the stairs himself and assisted in the search, making it so funny and amusing, that Carry’s incipient tears were soon turned into smiles, though the missing articles were not discovered till the Vicar insisting that, as they had looked everywhere else, they must be in her own pocket, felt there, and

diving into the recesses of this mysterious receptacle, finally produced the flimsy little articles.

By this time 'papa' himself was being shouted for ; so he seized up Carry, ran down with her in his arms, popped her into the carriage beside mamma and Mabel (Robert and Harry being in the back seat), and joining the walking party himself, the whole family were at last off.

The day was already becoming warm ; but their three-mile walk lay through shady country lanes, and the air was so fresh, the sun so bright, the sky so blue, best of all, their own hearts so in unison with all around them, that the walkers never thought of heat nor fatigue, but were rather sorry, as they drew near the foot of the hill, to see Harry driving back to meet them. However, as Mrs. Arnold had sent him for them, the Vicar persuaded Miss Storey, Mary, and Anna to avail themselves of his services, and walked on himself with his two elder boys, whilst Harry drove off gallantly, delighted with being entrusted with so important a freight.

The large party once more united, all immediately set to work to mount the long sloping hill, and such a glorious scramble as that which followed, Bridget had never yet enjoyed. For some distance the way was smooth and even, the ascent gradual enough to be easy ; and then, from time to time, those who liked it, sat down to rest and enjoy a little of the serene, brilliant loveliness above, around, beneath them. This, of course, Frank, John, and Harry never liked, but charging straight up the hill, on its stiffest, steepest side, arrived hot, breath-

less, trembling-kneed at its summit, a whole half hour before Anna and Robert, their first followers, an honour of which, however, even then they had scarcely breath to boast.

Then the Vicar came running up, Mabel screaming with delight upon his back ; next he toiled up with poor Carry, who had stuck half way, and was clutching the grass with all her might, far too timid either to go back or on ; then mamma had to be helped up the height on which her husband and children were this day choosing to eat their dinners ; and then at last the Vicar's toils were over, and he was at leisure to fling himself down on the grass, shade his eyes with his hands, and gaze, not idly but at rest, into the pure blue sky above him.

By this time it was half-past twelve, and after ten minutes' quiet, the walking party were, after all their exertions and labours, fast becoming hungry, a feeling to which Caroline was the first to give vent.

'You had better rest a little longer, Carry,' said Mr. Arnold, 'for Thomas has our dinners, so we can't have them, want them as we may, before he comes.'

'There he is, Carry, don't you see ?' said John ; 'that little black speck ever so far below I tell you what, Frank, let's run down and help him ; it must be rather heavy.'

'No, nonsense ; it's far too comfortable here,' answered Frank, flinging himself back on the grass again.

'No, you'd better not go, John,' said even the Vicar ; 'you know you are not the strongest of the

strong, whatever you think yourself, and you'll have had quite exercise enough by the time you get home, as it is.'

'How long will he be?' asked Carry, dejectedly.

'Thomas?' said her father. 'Half an hour quite, I'm afraid; the hill is so much longer than it looks. So,' and he sat up, recalled from pleasant dreamy visions to practical every-day life, 'we had better amuse ourselves as we best can till he comes. Now, Carry, I have thought of something; only twenty guesses allowed, you know; so try to find out.'

Many beside Carry joined in the game, and as the players were too young to be very acute, and only such questions as those to which 'Yes' or 'No' could be given were allowable, the children, when the twenty guesses were over, were as far as ever from discovering that the thinker was thinking of Carry's own eye. Mr. Arnold was generous enough to allow ten guesses more, and the shout of delight with which Robert hailed his final successful conjecture, was continued in honour of Thomas, who had now reached the foot of their own immediate acclivity.

All fell to work with good heart on the very plain fare which alone cook had been able to provide on such very short notice; but of such as it was there was plenty and to spare, and the Arnolds brought to it ready-made that great essential to the enjoyment of a meal which a late Grace of Bedford had to ride miles to obtain. Dinner over, they once more fell to round games, and the children puzzled the Vicar to their heart's content, by setting him to guess a flash of lightning, though sadly afraid

their hesitation about declaring it vegetable, animal, or mineral, and again, whether useful or ornamental, would have betrayed their secret.

This over, all started on such rambles as pleased them, Frank, John, Anna, and Harry down the other side of the hill for the mere pleasure of climbing it again. The Vicar wandered off with his wife and the younger children ; whilst Mary took Bridget a quiet walk along the top of the hill, pointing out one lovely view or place of note after another, till the two finally settled themselves side by side to the most difficult task in the world, that of giving some idea in paper and pencil of the beauties stretching far away beneath them ; the smiling, sunny landscape, traversed fork-like here and there by the glittering Severn, and bounded by the noble, peaceful Malvern hills, to-day wearing an intense blue, which Bridget had hitherto only seen in pictorial representations of such objects, and had scarcely believed to be more than *founded* on fact.

‘ If one could only colour it,’ she said at last, looking at her own first crude attempt at sketching with great and not unmerited contempt.

‘ Yes, if one could,’ repeated Mary, half-sighing. ‘ Sophy has taken this very view, and you cannot think how lovely her drawing is ; she is so clever at it : she passed Netta long ago.’

‘ But Lady Duthoyte draws very well in water-colours,’ said Bridget, recalling the drawing-hung rooms at the Hall.

‘ Oh, yes, because she has been so well taught ; she copies very well, but Sophy’s sketches beat hers

long ago. But then Netta does not care for drawing, only Lady Agnes will have them all taught everything.'

'And Miss Merivale does like drawing?'

'Oh, so much! and papa says her sketches are so very clever and original, that he is sure, if she were a poor woman, she might make her fortune by them; and this summer she is learning oils!'

And Mary sighed—sighed, poor child, for some of the educational advantages as freely lavished amongst the Merivales upon those who appreciated them as those who did not.

Bridget knew by this time what such a sigh meant.

'Perhaps, by-and-bye, when Miss Merivale has more time, she will teach you.'

'Oh, no, she'll never think of that; rich people are so selfish;' and then Mary coloured, and hastily changed the subject.

But this was the only sad speech said, or sad feeling felt, during this long summer day. And, happily, as the sun went down, a soft, cool breeze arose, and put fresh strength into the weary feet then beginning to turn homewards. Mr. Arnold ran down the steep top first, with one child after another, and then all sauntered down the hill, turning back, one after another, for a last glimpse of the lovely bird's-eye view which they were so fast leaving behind them.

Carry and Mabel were beginning to be rather a drag and weary encumbrance before level ground was reached again, but the Vicar carried first one, then another, and kept Carry's impending low spirits wonderfully successfully at bay. So at last, Mrs.

Arnold and her four younger children were safe off again, and now the elders did not reject or despise her last words—‘We will drive home as quickly as we can, and send Thomas back at once for you poor walkers.’

The carriage did meet them half way. Bridget, Mary, and Anna got joyfully into it. Who should be the fourth? Frank? ‘oh, dear, no; he wasn’t tired!’ John? ‘oh, no; at least, he would rather walk!’ and so the Vicar jumped in himself, saying, laughingly, as he took the reins, ‘Well, I cannot repeat either speech, for I own to being very tired, and would much rather ride,’ and so cracked the whip, and was off, and, looking back, was well pleased to see John’s arm thrown carelessly, in boy fashion, round Frank’s neck, and the two trudging along talking merrily.

Mrs. Arnold had exerted herself, and made the most of her half-hour’s start. Robert and Mabel were safe in bed and out of the way when the second carriage-full arrived, and more, a cool, fresh, neatly-laid tea was awaiting the new comers in the dining-room; and certainly, enjoyable as a scrambling meal, sans knives, sans forks, sans everything may be every now and then, when limbs and hearts are light and fresh, I doubt whether, after all, the Aggesden Vicarage party did not enjoy that cool, quiet, peaceful, refreshing evening meal even more than its merry, sunshiny, scrambling predecessor, at the top of Breedon Hill.

And so, a few mornings after this expedition, Bridget started for her true home, leaving, now she knew it thoroughly, so happy a home behind her,

that she felt this leaving Aggesden would have been little less painful than leaving Laurel-terrace nine months ago had been, had she not known that its master and mistress liked their governess as much as their governess loved and respected them, and so there was no fear this parting would be a final one, or her lingering glance at the little village church a last farewell.

John, 'her own John,' was waiting for her at the Paddington station—had squeezed her hand, found her luggage, and hurried her into a cab, before they had had time to exchange more words than 'How do you do?'

Then at last Bridget had time and leisure to gaze at her brother, and John at his sister. He was grown—oh, yes!—and was going through that imperceptible but wonderful transition from boyhood to manhood. His voice, too, was cracking, and was a strange mixture of inordinate and uncertain height and depth; also he looked very pale-faced after all Bridget's neighbours had so long been country men and women. But he was still himself, frank and a little bluff—at least so seeming after his namesake at Aggesden,—and perhaps a little shy (after nine months' separation) of his own sister, who was, he at once felt, much improved in many ways.

And the young man's feeling was quite right. Intercourse with superior minds, familiarity with a refinement and good breeding of which, (much as many a tidy and well-to-do home it contained, might have put the unpunctual disorder of Aggesden Vicarage to shame), no specimen could be

found in Laurel-terrace—had insensibly raised the young girl's own mind, refined not only her manners, but her very personal appearance. The mere fact, also, of having striven so earnestly to fulfil her new duties, and of having succeeded to the entire satisfaction of those under whom she had been acting, had given a quiet self-possession and modest independence to the young governess, unknown to her before. In one word, Bridget Storey had left her home an unformed girl, and returned to it a woman.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE COUNTESS DUTHOYTE.

There is a smile which wit extorts
 From grave and learned men,
 In whose austere and servile sports
 The plaything is a pen :
 And there are smiles by shallow worldlings worn
 To grace a lie, or laugh a truth to scorn.

And there are smiles with less alloy,
 Of those who for the sake
 Of some they loved, would kindle joy
 Which they cannot partake.
 But hers was of the kind which simply say
 They come from hearts ungovernably gay.

HENRY TAYLOR.

ALL this time the village school had been progressing as quickly as money, and power, and an ever-present eye could make it ; indeed the longest part of the business was the piloting the plans safely through the endless shoals and calms of the Committee of Council of Education. On Monday, the 25th, the feast of the patron saint of the church, the village school was to be publicly opened, when Mr. Taylor would bid farewell to his old scholars, and the school and house being given over to the final touches of the painters and paperers, was to be in a fit state for the new master to take possession and receive scholars by the time harvest was over. One of Bridget

Storey's regrets was that all this must take place in her absence.

The new school buildings were so pretty, and the arrangements for the children so far more convenient and comfortable than any Aggesden had ever known before, that by this time the tide had already turned, and the good people were beginning to look on the gabled and porched pile of building (Mr. Arnold had taken Sir Hector at his word) as an honour and ornament to their birthplace.

Mr. Arnold had quite hoped that Sir Hector himself might have been induced to come down, give *éclat* to the opening, and thus begin to take interest in the work for which he himself had provided so large a share of the needful funds. But no, almost as soon as Hector was released from school his father had carried off himself and Harry on a tour in Brittany, and there the opening of the Aggesden school would still find them.

'It is hard if, with a parish so prolific in grandees,' said the Vicar, in making final arrangements for the opening, 'we cannot get one of them to be present on the first public event in the parish this hundred years. Ah! I will write to Lady Duthoyte and see if she and her husband will come down; they are in town, but there's nothing just now going on in the House of enough importance to keep them there—that is, if they choose to come.'

The Vicar accordingly wrote to his old favourite by that very day's post, Tuesday the 19th, and on the morning of Thursday received the following answer :—

' Wednesday Afternoon.

' DEAR MR. ARNOLD,

*' I was half afraid I should not have been able to catch my husband in time to answer your letter by to-day's post ; but he has just come in for a little rest, poor fellow, after taking the chair at some meeting for providing decent homes for poor needlewomen, and I made him keep awake just long enough to consent to the delightful plan your kind letter put into my head—that we should get free of all this heat and glare on Saturday, and see dear old Aggesden in all its beauty by spending Sunday and Monday at the Hall, and thus hear the organ, and see the schools, both of which I had been longing to do. Oh, you cannot tell how hot and dusty London is!—so hot that I let my husband decide I should *not* go with him to Exeter Hall this afternoon ; it does make me so very hot, even on the coolest day, to see him chained to a chair, and forced to listen complacently to such trash as the very best men seem to utter when once they are on their legs in that great place. Harry is waking, so I must seal this up at once, or he will think these remarks so irrelevant he will make me write the whole letter again, which I am far too lazy either to do or to fight about.*

' Best love to all, and many thanks to you for your thought of us, in which honest politeness I am sure his lordship would join had not nature conquered him—and he is fast asleep again.

*' I am afraid you will think me no wiser for my marriage ; but indeed I am, and *can* be quite sensible. No, rather think though my husband rules*

me with a rod of iron, he has not yet succeeded in breaking my spirit. I really must leave off, or I shall be obliged myself to tear this up; common decency will require it. With kind love once more,

‘Believe me, ever yours,

‘ANTOINETTE DUTHOYTE.’

‘Carlton Terrace.

‘What do you think? Duthoyte woke up just as I was directing this, and, asking to see what I had said, I was forced to show it, and his remark was so touchingly mild: ‘Why, Netta, going to Aggesden has quite upset your little brain,’ that I really would write you a most grave and decorous answer had I time to do so before going to dress for a stupid state dinner at my mother-in-law’s. So, good-bye once more, and burn this, please. Oh! and he said I ought in honesty to say, he is engaged to lecture at Duthoyte on Tuesday, so that we only take Aggesden on our way.’

‘Well, certainly matrimony has not broken either Netta’s heart or spirit yet,’ said the Vicar, as when left alone he was talking the letter over with his wife; ‘and I may now own I did rather fear that the first year would cost poor merry, rattling Netta, a little awe and disappointment. A most thoroughly conscientious man I know Lord Duthoyte to be, in private as well as in public life, but when, as in his case, a young man has done everything for himself, and the whole tone of his own family is so essentially selfish and worldly, he is too likely to become, insensibly, a little stiff and overbearing in his own opinions—something of a religious tyrant in his own home.’

Saturday evening saw the young Earl and Countess alight at the Hall, and Antoinette, hastily getting rid of the light outer clothing such a fiery day as this had been in London when they started, had required, ran down to the dining-room, where the choicest, prettiest, and most refreshing of teas had been laid, under the charge of the good old housekeeper, who was as much delighted as the Vicar at this unexpected arrival of any of the young people.

Lady Merivale spent the summer mostly away with a maiden sister in Herefordshire, and being at this very time with her, the young husband and wife had the whole house and grounds to themselves, and after tea sauntered all about the brilliant gardens and cool green glades of the park, drinking in, as only Londoners can, the sweet pure freshness of the quiet country air.

On Sunday great was the pleasurable excitement which the young couple's unexpected appearance in the large, long empty Hall pew occasioned.

It was a cool, shady day, and the Earl and Countess had walked down early to the church, wishing to see the change in its general effect which their gift must have produced, before the service began. At the sight of the first old woman they retreated to their pew, and so when they arose, as the Morning Hymn was struck up, their sudden appearance took all by surprise.

Certainly their 'young lady' had undergone no course of home discipline, or public gaiety, or even public meetings, sufficient to mar in any way her sweet looks. The young Countess Duthoyte looked

just as happy, just as lovely as she stood amongst them to-day, in her simple white-ribboned straw bonnet, and flowing dove-coloured silk dress, as she had ever done in her gayest of gay dresses half a year ago. Indeed, the full, rich, grave-coloured silk, and simple but fashionable bonnet, seemed to suit her tall, graceful figure and sweet, fair face, as even the brightest and slightest of attire had never become it.

No ; she was very little changed—a little quieter and more dignified when she shook hands heartily with all her little cousins, in the presence of the many old neighbours who had stayed to see their young Countess a little better,—but not too dignified to nod first to one, then to another of those she recognised around her ; to inquire after old Master Blogg's rheumatics and Jane Davy's cough.

Then, when the Vicar came out, the whole Vicarage party walked back some little way with them along the Park road, Netta leaning on her husband's arm, talking frankly, freely, lightheartedly as of old.

‘ Well,’ said the Vicar, as after parting he turned back to watch the young pair pursue their way, ‘ there goes the sweetest woman but one in England. Why, what is her Ladyship running back about ?’

‘ Oh ! Mr. Arnold, will you let Johnnie come up and dine with us this evening ? I have seen nothing whatever of Hector since Christmas. Papa carried him off to Brittany when *we* were at Duthoyte, and I want to hear all about the school, and how Hector has been getting on. Oh ! you wont refuse ?’

It is *not* Sunday visiting, or Harry would not have let me ask him, would you?' turning to her husband.

Lord Duthoyte smiled his grave, courteous smile.

'But perhaps, Netta, Mr. Arnold's ideas and mine upon Sunday visiting do not agree, so we wont press it.'

'Oh, but we will press it; I must have him, yes, and Mary too. Mr. Arnold, you must say yes. You know it is the only day we can have them, so that it really is a work of necessity.'

Mr. Arnold caught sight of the two pair of eager young eyes watching so anxiously for his answer, and gave way, inwardly thinking that with Lord Duthoyte as master of the house this would be very different to what Sunday visiting with the Hector Merivales would have been; a species of intercourse which he had determined from their very first return to Aggesden, was a thing he would never allow, Robert being the only motive which had hitherto proved strong enough to make him break this rule; although it had at first given some offence to Sir Hector, and much disappointment amongst his own children; this last once or twice to himself, but this was but fair.

After the afternoon service, Antoinette stayed to speak to her choir girls and boys, and try the organ, drawing from it sounds which as yet Mary lacked knowledge and actual strength of hand to produce. Then she asked the children to sing some of their old hymns and chants, and by this time it was five, and time for them to return to their six o'clock dinner. Mary and John walked back with them,

and Mr. Arnold, Frank, and Anna were engaged to come up and drink tea, and walk home with the young diners before dark. Mr. Arnold had never seen so much of the Earl as he did in the hour and a half he this evening spent at the Hall, sauntering with his old pupil's son-in-law up and down the lawn, or sitting under its lovely far-spreading cedars, and watching the sun sink down mid purple and gold in the break in the Aggesden woods.

But all this is running far away from the opening of Aggesden school, where weather happily favoured the Vicar, and all went off well. The school-children had their tea and a game of play; their parents took their places, had tea again, and listened with great interest and delight to Lord Duthoyte's account of a tour in Sicily, which Mr. Arnold had persuaded him to deliver at Aggesden, *en route*—a subject stale enough to himself, but which a dry sense of humour, and strong perception of the ridiculous in the speaker, always made amusing enough to his audience. And then the Vicar bade farewell to Mr. Taylor, who, poor man, broke down, and struggled in vain for words to thank him; emotion which allayed for ever the last lingering grudge against poor Stokes' supplanter. And so the schools were opened, and every ghost of suspicion, jealousy, or anger against the new system of education, thus introduced amongst them, lulled to rest for ever.

The Duthoytes went into the Vicarage for supper, the refreshment the gentry had obtained at the impromptu soirée having been but slight. And

then Antoinette laughed so much at the grand moral her husband had drawn from his three weeks' tour, at the illustrations he had found some obscure struggling painter in Bury Duthoyte to do for him, asked so mockingly how often he had made the same jokes, and whether she must expect to hear exactly the same to-morrow, that Mr. Arnold quite wondered that his Lordship took it all so quietly and good-humouredly, little guessing how delightful Antoinette's sparkling gaiety was to her practical, hard-working, far-thinking husband.

'Now, Netta, I want you to talk to me a little,' interposed the Vicar at last. 'You can laugh at your husband every day of your life; but I only get you about once in three months.'

'What can I talk about except his lecture and its wit? Now did not I do my duty in looking sad, or surprised, or amused, just exactly when I ought? I am sure no one would have discovered half your witticisms if I had not pointed them out by an appropriate smile, and emboldened them, by my example, to laugh themselves. I declare, Harry, I see quite a new career of usefulness spread out before me—that of show-woman to your lectures. I have often before now privately clapped your speeches. Oh yes, I have often—so don't look so surprised and shocked—clapped quite loud under my shawl, and knocked my parasol upon my seat, because I had no umbrella, and so could not reach the floor like the good old ladies around me. You were asking me the other day what I should like for a present on the fifth. I know now—a great green cotton umbrella, with a brass handle and white edge,

like that belonging to the old lady in the coal-scuttle-bonnet, whom you said so crossly you would not have me laugh at any more. Ah, I see what made you so angry; *she* could make such a nice noise with her powerful instrument—its thumpings even reached the noble Chairman, whilst the taps of my poor dainty parasol never reached other ears than my own, I am afraid.'

'Well, and now, little rattle, as you *are* out of breath at last, suppose you eat your supper. I assure you you are keeping every one waiting.'

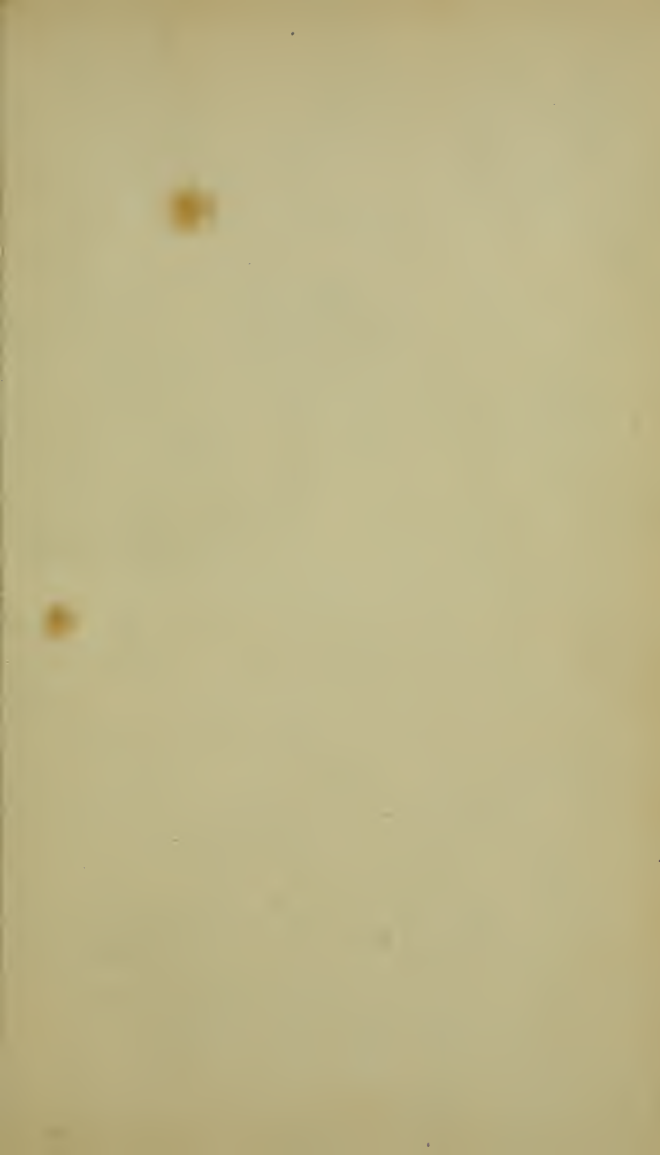
No! am I? Oh, Mrs. Arnold, I beg your pardon; but I will not be a minute. How can one touch mortal food after such an intellectual feast as that spread before us but an hour ago!

And so the Vicar learnt that though Antoinette had not left off 'rattling,' she cared no longer to rattle on any subject but her husband. Perhaps the next stage in her sobering into an English matron might be the discontinuance of this practice, but this Mr. Arnold doubted. Such lively, almost aimless talk, was so true a characteristic of Sir Hector's daughter.

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